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Inheritance and legacy: a phenomenological exploration

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

INHERITANCE AND LEGACY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION.

by

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To Anna, for being my support in time of crisis and the resonance chamber of joy.

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INHERITANCE AND LEGACY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION

(Order No.)

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The aim of this dissertation is to analyze and discuss the individual experience of cultural legacy and inheritance, intended as the transmission of an immaterial product, from the perspective of continental philosophy, and especially through the lens of phenomenology. In particular, I discuss why the conventional way of approaching the matter in terms of tradition is unsatisfying when faced with the deeply personal nature of the Inheritance/Legacy phenomenon.

I analyze the concept of ‘content’ as the intellectual object to be transmitted and received in the process, and define it in terms of fragmentability and inclusiveness: what is the minimal notion that we can still inherit? What is the largest conglomerate of ideas that we can approach as *one* content?

I introduce the fundamental notion of *cultural density*, as an alternative to *culture* in the discussion of the individual approach to contents. In particular, I define cultural density as the sum of all possible contents potentially available to an individual at any given time.

Then, I move to the analysis of the moment of attention, as the locus of actualization of the contents, which are available in one's cultural density and, through attention, move into the interpretative space of *inheritance*. I also distinguish between attention and attentiveness.

The core of my dissertation focuses in turn on *Inheritance* (the process of receiving a content from a previous author and making it ours) and *Legacy* (the creation of cultural contents in the perspective of a future receiver). I analyze their temporal relation and their complex interaction with our perception of time. I show how they are interconnected and how they both rely on narration (and specifically on self narration as a form of re-presentation) to be brought into actuality.

Finally, I deal with their co-dependence and show how the reliance of Inheritance and Legacy on each other (with each needing the other to come first) gives rise to an apparent paradox. I suggest the notion of a saturated phenomenon (elaborated by Marion) to solve it, with an invitation to conceive the inconceivable (following Derrida and Levinas).

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Foreword.

Soon I'll find the right words.

They will be very simple.

– Jack Kerouac, *Some of the Dharma*

My interest in the analysis of cultural transmission began almost ten years ago when I was writing an undergraduate thesis in History of Ancient Christianity. The topic of this work was the recovery, narration and (it turned out) defense of a second-century gnostic Christian heretic – Marcion – by one of the fathers of the 'historical method' Adolf von Harnack. In one chapter of my scarcely significant work – mainly a translation and summary of Harnack's book – I dealt with the problem of Good Faith, i.e. discussed how Harnack was extremely interested in showing that Marcion acted *bona fide* when presenting his view of God and the world to the new-born Christian community.¹ These were just marginalia, since the rest of my work focused on philological and historical matters.

¹ I will not go into details about either Marcion or von Harnack, here, since the substance of their theological views is irrelevant to my topic. Harnack's book – to which I refer here – is published in English as Adolf von Harnack. *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007.

It was not until a couple of years later, when writing my master's thesis on the recovery of Origen of Alexandria by *nouveaux théologiens*², that I came to be involved in reflections akin to those raised by previous research. Here, the rehabilitation of a past author (formally declared an heretic, but still present in ecclesiastical historical and theological discourse) was direct and far more structural than simply showing his good faith. I found myself debating the rationale of these theologian's re-appropriation of Origen, which when devoid of specific contingent notions could be reduced to questioning the reason behind modern authors' recovery and re-discovery of ancient ones.

My doctoral project was born from these questions, and it was originally intended to explore the historical implications of acts of "recovery", especially in the dialogue internal to the Catholic Church. However, after my move to the US, I began questioning the 'structures' that I had taken as granted and discovering what I considered a problem for my intended project: the discussion of how "negative" cultural inheritance could be overturned and become fertile in a modern discourse needed to be preceded by a more general theory of cultural transmission, that could account for personal initiative and situations, since both cases that had initiated my exploration could not be described simply by utilizing the terminology of tradition; this appeared to be a secondary phenomenon and its experience to be "derivative"

² Once again, I will not discuss this in detail, although I will address the topic in chapter three, when discussing the effort to 'rehabilitate' a previous author. There is no published work - that I am aware of - on the topic of Origen as a transversal concern for Ressourcement Theologians - as they are known in English.

of someone else's way of receiving a content (i.e. relying on someone else's interpretation of the past instated as a source of authority).

Through the discovery of French phenomenology, I glimpsed at a new approach to the topic, which offered a way into the problem. The intention was (and is) to make a clean slate of preconceived notions on the topic (which had accumulated in my scholarly voyage through history, religious studies and anthropology), and face these questions with a radically new approach; this would mean re-building my concept of cultural transmission from the ground up, discarding as secondary anything that could not be shown to be part of the essential phenomena of Inheritance and – conversely – Legacy. Even Recovery, a word and a concept crucial to my master's thesis, was gradually renounced, when I found that it was nothing else than a form – no matter how problematic – of what I have here and elsewhere defined as cultural Inheritance.

What remained to be done, therefore, was to make this exploration (based on a constructive project of philosophy, and not on a historical discussion of previous theories – although I do address some of those) intelligible to others, and to describe step by step the thought-process that had led me to certain conclusions. In the process of explaining all of this, I was forced to deal with topics that I had not foreseen as part of my exploration (namely the definition of a content and the problem of the moment of attention).

My hope is that the reader will be able to follow me in my discussion of these topics, and that any confusion that will arise from my failure to achieve clarity could

end up being dissipated by reading further; I hope, thus, that perceived obscurities (due to my shortcomings in making some passages understandable and evident) will be illuminated by further explanation, given that in all of my work I have tried to stay away from over imposed pre-conceptions and conclusions that did not arise consequentially from the analysis of the phenomena.

Introduction.

What is an intellectual or cultural Inheritance? What will our immaterial Legacy be? How do the two come to be formed? What is our role in such a construction and how much, instead, is determined by factors that surpass and are independent from our willing action? Inheritance and Legacy, Heritage, Tradition, Culture: all of these terms are interchangeably used in our everyday language, to describe the reality in which we are part of a society and educated individuals with access to a multiplicity of texts and 'cultural' items in general (from pictures to performances, from movies to books, etc.). Nonetheless, if we take a closer look at the events that these words indicate, we start distinguishing between them and between the phenomena that emerge in our inevitable approach to society and communication.

We are historical beings. From the moment we are born, we are surrounded by a history that happened before us, but that is made present to us: not only are we *told* such a history, we are immersed in a cultural construct that thrives in tradition and is shaped by it. Multiple traditions can converge into our experience of the world, but a large part of the cultural norms and objects that we encounter can be traced back to an origin in the past, which is brought into the present *for us* (not necessarily *by us*) by the actions and words of others.

As individuals, we are constantly presented with cultural objects (texts, pictures, works of art) and structures (traditions, norms) that are 'already there', and constitute for us an inheritance with which we must deal, willingly or not. Nonetheless, the way we receive (or refuse to receive) such inheritances shapes what our Inheritance (capitalized) will be. Inheritance, as an individual approach to the Past as it is offered and presented to us by the world we live in, has been vastly underrepresented in the modern philosophical approach to history (and history of culture in particular), torn between the effort of considering humanity at large (in terms of the Spirit of Hegelian descent) and the focus on single instances of such a reception. Inheritance is thus a process in which we receive a content, but it is also the overall ever-evolving complex of all the cultural contents we have received and incorporated into our system of knowledge, and in our approach to the culture that presented us such contents in the first place.

Similarly, everything we say or write becomes part of a potential network of information susceptible of being received (and inherited) in the future (no matter how close) by *an Other* who is not predetermined and who might very well not be who we intended. This process is the constitution of our legacy, another term vastly used in the discussion of history of culture (with the Legacy of an author or a school being addressed as a well-understood concept), but rarely discussed in itself. The construction of one's Legacy is only partially dependent on will, since we have little or no control over our words and ideas after they have left us to be consigned to the vastness of human communication.

At this point a terminological note is necessary: through my work, I tried to use a language as close as possible to that of the authors and theories to which I refer, with two pairs of notable exception. The first is the Inheritance/inheritor duo, with inheritor being the one who inherits, quite simply. As we shall see, he/she is not simply the interpreter of a text, but *an* interpreter who receives the text/document *in a certain way*. More problematic, from a terminological point of view, is the corresponding person who created the text/document that is inherited (and that can be part of a Legacy). I have resorted to the term *inheritee*, which amounts, I am aware, to a neologism, modeled after the *givee* of recent phenomenological discussions. Nonetheless, any alternative was “taken” - so to speak - and I was particularly wary of using ‘author’, which has been charged of a manifold pre-constructed meaning by modern theories of interpretation. Also, in more than one place of my dissertation there will be the necessity to distinguish between the author (as the *one who wrote*) and the inheritee, and therefore I could not have collapsed the two terms into one. The reader should keep this in mind, and forgive the necessity for this neologism.

The relation between Legacy and Inheritance is at first strikingly self-evident: in terms of texts and ideas, we inherit something that has been said or written by someone else. Contents of our Inheritance (our inheritances, non capitalized and plural) previously belong(ed) to someone else’s Legacy, and vice versa: our Legacy is only realized as such when someone inherits our words and concepts, which would otherwise be lost in the crowd, so to speak. One cannot be

conceived without the other, especially when we move from the generality of their possibility/potentiality to the more concrete level of *a* single instance of transmission of texts and ideas: any text has an author (albeit not necessarily a known one) to whose Legacy it potentially belongs, and an indefinite number of potential inheritors, the readers and interpreters of the text.

At the same time, a problematic dimension of their correspondence emerges upon reflection: if the text is already inserted into an Inheritance and a Legacy, which one is the primary phenomenon (if it is possible at all to find one) and which a merely derivative event? On closer examination (carried out through this work) we will have to conclude that the two instances (Legacy and Inheritance) are co-dependent, and despite their perceived chronological distance (the moment of reading and that of writing are not coincident and diachronic elements intervene even in a uttering/listening exchange) they are generated in the same moment, which will be defined as a Moment of Passing¹, with the content that is passed on *by* the inheritee *onto* the inheritor, with each term presupposing the other.

This moment, in which a cultural content passes from the general cultural milieu of an author into her own system of philosophy, is at the same time *le point de départ* and the conclusion of the transmission of such contents and *traditio* needs

¹ See chapter 1, note 1, for a first reflection on the word, or chapter 5 for a full discussion of the Moment of Passing.

to be phenomenologically thematized as it develops in this moment of encounter.² It is a moment that appears ungraspable (since it requires a suspension of our notion of causality as chronologically ordered) but that is nonetheless continuously repeated in our appropriation of our cultural past, and that is particularly relevant in an academic approach to canonical authors or (on the other hand of the spectrum) when new authors are read and proposed as relevant.

This dissertation is the natural continuation of my aforementioned studies. After having dedicated many of my papers to the problem of recovery and inheritance in particular cases (among others, Harnack and Barth's use of Luther and the rediscovery of Bonaventure in modern philosophy of mind), I realised that a step back was needed, to discuss what these 'recoveries', 're-reading', 're-appropriation' meant, what they had in common; from there, the reflection on Inheritance as a fundamentally independent phenomenon was born, and my research efforts have been focused on using what modern continental philosophy had said on the matter to describe a coherent theory of cultural transmission from the point of view of the individual (in contrast with the more group-focused and authority dependent nature of *tradition*).

² Hermeneutics (and reception theory in particular) have dealt extensively with the dual issue of *traditio* and *traditum*; the focus, however, was on the content (*traditum*) and the *traditio* was approached mainly as the origin of it, thus analyzing the process of contents' accumulation and modification only in relation to their final product and not as a phenomenon to which the contents can and shall remain a contingency, to be bracketed out in order to reach a phenomenological definition.

It has been a demanding journey, with much self-contradiction involved. I had to limit, redefine or even renounce themes and categories that had appeared to be suitable to my discussion and crucial to my exploration in light of my case studies, but that proved not to be central when a more systematic reflection started. In particular, the main focus shifted from the concept of Recovery to the more fundamental ones of Inheritance and Legacy.

With the term *Recovery*, I indicate the reclamation by modern thinkers of previously forgotten or disgraced authors, either by a translation/edition of their texts or by a critical reflection able to reverse or shake the common (negative) judgment crystallized in the cultural milieu. While the attention to the voices of the past is not at all an exclusive feature of modernity, the increased availability of texts (via print), the improvement in communication networks, the development of scholarly publications and the need to justify the proposal (or re-proposal) of a philosophical system to an academic and demanding educated public have significantly reshaped the nature of Recovery. The main reason Inheritance had to take the front stage and push Recovery back into an ancillary role was my realization of the overbearing presence of the *inheritee* in the Moment of Passing, a presence that Recovery alone could not fully account for.

Recovery orbits around the Inheritance-Legacy duet (since this *something* to be recovered constitutes someone's Legacy and it is going to be part of someone's Inheritance), and adds the problem of intentionality, which is present *in nuce* in Inheritance as well, but without a similarly preeminent role. Inheritance and

Recovery are not just instances of memory (or *anamnesis*); it constructs its content not directly from what is accessible in an author's culture: it requires two additional steps, namely evaluation of the clues (that something valuable is out there) and the overcoming of the *vulnus* which prevents the content from being proper part of the cultural milieu (be this *vulnus* a low accessibility of the text or a moral/intellectual stigma). Recovery was a precious intellectual tool when I was exploring some of the most intricate facets of the Moment of Passing, relating to the will of the inheritor, the "value" of the *inheritee* and the *bona fide* of both. However, my analysis will show how Recovery is to be understood as a subset of Inheritance, a specific case that I will address when dealing with the problem of 'good faith' and the 'good character' of the inheritee.

The need for a characterization of the problem at stake stems from the heavily charged status of the terms previously and commonly used when mentioning these processes, namely transmission (cf. Gadamer, Dilthey, etc.) and tradition (spanning from Christianity historians to anthropologists, theologians etc). Tradition³ involves a concept of 'value' which is not necessarily present when

³ Notably, tradition has been a main concern even outside philosophy and more so in anthropological studies. The reason for excluding such an academic 'tradition on tradition' is twofold: first, the analytic and often structuralist approach of anthropologists like Hobsbawn – cf. *The Invention of Tradition* – and Handler – cf. in particular the article coauthored with Linnekin *Tradition, Genuine or Spurious* – or sociologists like Edward Shill operates with a different methodology, strictly related to the analysis of a case study, going from the particular to the general and without the effort of discovering universals that can

discussing the Inheritance-Legacy binomial, and often refers to an authority (either personal – viz. the Church - or impersonal – *mores*): it indicates a subset of the problem, important but not as immediately personal as the categories which are proposed here. Theorists of ‘transmission’, on the other hand, focus on the aftermath of what I call the ‘moment of passing’, in which a legacy is instituted and an inheritance generated, and discuss how the content is to be received (thus interpreting the potential inheritance as a given and only analysing the way in which it is actualised).

As Bernard de Chartres (via John of Salisbury) used to say, we are ‘like dwarves seated on the shoulders of giants.’⁴ Regardless of our estimation of such

be considered aprioristic to the contingency. Secondly, the anthropological and sociological approach is concerned with groups and societies, to which the individual must relate: tradition in the anthropological sense cannot be singlehandedly undertaken or maintained; the ‘set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules’ (Eric Hobsbawn. *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: University Press, 1983, p. 1) needs to be shared and repeated by a group (more often than not the majority of the population and/or the ruling class) in order to be relevant. The transmission which is to be analyzed here, instead, is an individual fact, independent from a collective will or adherence: while the availability of potential inheritances is inextricably connected to the concept of cultural density (which will be discussed in chapter one), the primacy of the individual’s agency is crucial to the analysis of the Legacy/Inheritance phenomenon. For these reasons, the anthropological analysis (which would have heterogeneous goals and would require a different set of competencies) is expunged from this work, and this choice strengthens the need for a different terminology, which I have already advocated.

⁴ As far as I know, the first recognized appearance of this famous sentence is indeed in John of Salisbury’s *Metalogicon*, 3.4 («Dicebat Bernardus Carnotensis nos esse quasi nanos

giants (since there is nothing epistemologically necessary in considering traditions and the ideas of our predecessors worthy), there is no arguing that we deal with our cultural past on an everyday basis. This is especially true in environments where the transmission of culture is regulated by institutions charged with authority (as in churches and academic environments). Whether tradition is an explicit part of the claim to such authority (as it is often the case with historically established Churches) or whether it is a commonly accepted matter of affairs (as it is the case in the academic study of humanities), there is no escaping a confrontation with what was written, said and thought in the past.

In my dissertation, I will argue that while tradition (a common frame of reference in our experience of Inheritance) has received due attention by philosophers and most importantly by sociologists, Inheritance has not been the focus of a self-standing, autonomous philosophical analysis. Inheriting a text has been considered as nothing more of a matter of fact, without proper consideration of the complex dynamics involved in the reading of a text that, by definition, belongs

gigantium humeris insidentes, ut possimus plura eis et remotiora videre, non utique proprii visus acumine, aut eminentia corporis, sed quia in altum subvehimur et extollimur magnitudine gigantean») which becomes, in Henry Osborn Taylor «*Bernard of Chartres used to say that we were like dwarfs seated on the shoulders of giants. If we see more and further than they, it is not due to our own clear eyes or tall bodies, but because we are raised on high and upborne by their gigantic bigness.*» (*The Mediaeval Mind*, Harvard: University Press, 1966, vol. 2, p. 159.)

to the past, and whose worth in the present is constituted exactly by the process of inheriting generated by our reading of it.

In order to account for what the status of the discussion is on this matter, I will begin with an historical perspective; in the first chapter, I mention the main authors I believe to have fruitfully contributed to the discussion of these phenomena. While highlighting the elements that I believe to be precious to this project (and that will be fully discussed in the following chapters), I will try to briefly explain why their chosen perspective leads them astray from a full theory of Inheritance, Legacy and Passing. Despite not being interested in confuting theories that are not “wrong” per se (but that simply focus on different aspects of the problem), I will show how and why authors that have dealt with notions of cultural transmission in the past have not fully tackled the problems of Inheritance and Legacy from the perspective of the individuals involved in this process.

The unsatisfying nature of an approach can reside in an excess of generality, as it is the case with both the sociological approach to tradition, addressing issues of *communal reception*⁵, and the Hegelian one focusing on Humanity at large. Both of these perspectives fail to properly address the personal experience of the Inheritor (and conversely of the originator of the Legacy, which I name the *inheritee*). This is not to say that an individual cannot relate to a tradition and be inspired by his being part of what is perceived as a communal reception, nor to imply that generalized discourses on Humanity and Culture are incompatible with the dimension of the

⁵ See *The Invention of Tradition*, op. cit., especially the introduction by Hobsbawm.

individual actor in culture; nevertheless, there is a level of personal relation to the content in time which cannot be resolved inside those models and needs to be explored in its own merit.

On the other end of the spectrum, Reception Theorists have analysed the reading and interpretation of a text, but without considering it against the frame of our general process of Inheritance, which is not and cannot be reduced to the single instance of interpreting *a* text, since it is part of a series of analogous moments (inheritances) which contribute to the shaping of our general Inheritance, i.e. the historical component and dimension of our cultural and philosophical standpoint. Reception Theory is not a compact, unified 'school', and there is a certain leeway between theories of interpretation relying on authorial intent⁶ and approaches favouring the text *per se*⁷.

After this historical excursus, I will move toward a definition of the "playing field" in which these instances of cultural transmission are experienced: *we inherit, receive, interpret, read* and so forth and so on, but the object of such actions is usually understood as a given. Definitions of a text (and in general of a cultural object that can be the object of our intellectual activity) presuppose an access to it,

⁶ Cf. in particular Hans Robert Jauss. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* and *Question and Answer*. Gadamer's approach to the question is more complicated, as discussed, for example, in David Weberman. "Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the Question of Authorial Intention." in Irwin, William, *The Death and Resurrection of the Author?* Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2002.

⁷ Most preeminently Roland Barthes in his *Death of the Author*.

which is always taken for granted. In my first chapter, then, I address the problem of the 'location' (both chronological and in terms of accessibility) of these cultural objects (these 'contents') in relation to our possibility of accessing them. I therefore introduce the notion of *cultural density*, and explain why, when dealing with the individual's experience of historicized cultural transmission, this is more appropriate, precise and useful than the overcharged notion of Culture (which necessarily involves a super-personal dimension).

Indeed, before delving into the fascinating albeit problematic notion of Inheritance, we have to distinguish its frame of operation. Our experience of the world never happens in a void, thus the Inheritance of *one* text, idea or cultural content in general already implies a restriction of the field from multiplicity to individuality (*the* text I am reading, *the* discourse I am listening to, compared to *all* of the ones I could have inherited instead). This will bring forward preliminary questions dealing with the 'space' in which this selection happens and disclosing the notion of 'attention', main force in the process of extraction of one's inheritance from the muddy waters of Culture and tradition.

Such a space is what I define as *cultural density*, i.e. the sum of all possible inheritances that are available to me and lie in my range of accessibility *as* potential before interpretation, and even before the attention that makes interpretation and reading possible. Cultural Density is thus meant to identify the complex of *accessible* inheritances surrounding a potential inheritor, possibly coinciding with his or her cultural milieu as enriched by his or her own experiences, characterized by a

constant state of expansion and modification largely independent from the *will* of such an inheritor.

I analyze the status of these cultural contents and objects of our interpretation before such an interpretation is taken for granted. We discuss texts and cultural contents (pictures, music, *topoi*, etc.) always from the perspective of the interpreter, without asking how this interpretation is even possible, not in terms of a *process* (a theme which has been properly addressed by Ricoeur⁸ among others) but in terms of the very possibility of it having an object. This leads us to the discussion of the complicated matter of pre-interpreted contents, an unfamiliar concept to which I dedicate a large part of my first chapter.

My breaking away from the overcharged notion of Culture (heavy with ethical and historical implications and involving a nebulous definition at best) is not meant to be and should not be understood as just a terminological clarification; it is a shift of perspective on the sum of cultural objects presented to the individual. The reclamation of the individual standpoint is crucial to understand how these contents are presented to and appropriated by the *attention* exerted by the protagonist of this exploration, the cultural inheritor.

Attention is indeed another unrepresented matter in philosophical elaborations on the topic of interpretation and cultural inheritance: we assume our possibility of reading and analyze the reasons of our choice of one text over another

⁸ See in particular: Paul Ricoeur. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976.

often without inquiring into the moment of attention, which needs to be explored to give account of such a choice. Once again, it is a matter of the correlation between potentiality and actualization of our inheritance, and at the same time a chronological problem: attention is easy to grasp as 'having been exerted' or, negatively, as absent. It is much harder, though, to account for attention as a momentary beginning; nonetheless, this needs to be done (or at least attempted) if we want our exploration of personal reception of cultural objects to be connected to the individual, personal experience of a cultural content, which we have discussed as the crucial feature of inheritance.

The instantaneous nature of attention has been explored more by fiction (and poetry in particular) than by systematic works of philosophy. The 'first sight' (or the much less thought-of 'first hearing') are much more present in verses and fictional descriptions than they are part of a theory of reception. Prejudice⁹ and pre-judgment are much more crucial to the accepted problematic of interpretation than the instantaneous moment of attention¹⁰. My second chapter, *The Moment of Attention*, focuses on the moment of individual acknowledgement of a content as antecedent to the moment of interpretation and shows how, before judgment, there

⁹ On the matter of prejudice in the scope of Reception Theory, see in particular Richard Kearney, *Between Tradition and Utopia*, in Wood, David. *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*. London ; New York: Routledge, 1991.

¹⁰ Germs of a theory of the moment of attention are arguably present in Bachelard's *The Intuition of the Instant*, but the author is much more concerned about rebutting Bergson's theories on time than about exploring such a concept.

is recognition of the content as that which is to be accessed; such a recognition is made possible by attention.

Once again, therefore, before dealing with Inheritance as a phenomenon (manifested in our choice and interpretation of the contents and their integration in a system) we must discuss how these contents we have individuated and located in the first chapter can become full objects of interpretation. Thus, the second chapter is completely dedicated to attention; on one side, this is understood in terms of a general faculty allowing us to extract a particular text from the mass of possible input (both sensorial and epistemological) that are presented to us everyday. On the other side, attention as the *moment* in which such an extraction is carried out is discussed and evaluated as the source of our capability for interpretation.

After having described the situation in which Inheritance can be thought and take place (i.e. a 'space' of potential inheritances are described as pre-accessed) and having analyzed the moment in which such potentiality is actualized through attention, I will be able to turn the focus to Inheritance per se. Chapter 3 will be dedicated to the core of my dissertation, i.e. Inheritance considered on its own. First of all, the phenomenon will need to be defined, clarifying certain paralogisms that are inevitable but risk confusing us. In particular, we need to distinguish the threefold signification of 'Inheritance', relating to a) the *act* of inheriting, b) the *single* content/text inherited, and c) the overall experience of cultural reception which shapes our view of the world and is integral to our intellectual and philosophical activity.

The nature of Inheritance is strictly related to the role of the inheritor in shaping its own history, not in a 'factual' sense, but on an epistemological level. In particular, *historical awareness* as intended by Gadamer¹¹ is a fundamental *discrimen* in our identification of an inheritance as such, since both require a historical perspective that goes beyond our comprehension of our present. In order for us to understand a text historically, and thus grasp its complete meaning (according to Gadamer) and understand it as an inheritance (in the scope of our exploration) we need to be fully conscious of the relative alienation of our presence in time when faced with a cultural content originating in a chronological elsewhere. German Philosophy (from Fichte to Schelling, from Herder to Voegelin) dealt extensively with the concept of Ages (or Epochs, etc.) of the history of the world, and a discussion of these 'sectors' of history (usually conceived as relatively homogenous) will be needed to show how the individuality of inheritance implies a necessary independence of the relation inheritee-inheritor from the traps and snares of such rigid categorizations.

The transformative role of inheritance (both for the content and for the inheritor) is discussed: according to Gadamer's notion of interpretation we recover the text as «la manifestation d'un moment créateur»¹², but this contrasts with the independence of our reading, which is always absolutely tied to our unfettered

¹¹ Cf. Hans Georg Gadamer, *Problèmes Épistémologiques de Sciences Humaines* in *Le Problème De La Conscience Historique*. Paris: Seuil, 1996.

¹² "The manifestation of a creative moment", from: Gadamer, *Fondation pour l'Hermeneutique*, in *Le Problème...* p. 75.

historical presence. Therefore, the intuitions about interpretation that we can gather from our reading of Gadamer (and through him of Heidegger) need to be mediated with Ricoeur's exploration of narrative as a meditational tool in our approach to time: since the very first chapters of *Time and Narrative*, he engages in a post-Augustinian discourse about aporias in our experience of time¹³, which he claims to be only solvable through a narrative of memory.

This will lead us to a discussion of the relation between memory (both collective and individual) and Inheritance (proper to the individuality of the inheritor), and the role of what Ricoeur defines as the Threefold Present of the mind. Here the individual is conceived as both inheritor and inheritee at the same time; this entangled situation needs to be fractioned and analyzed, and then to be reconstructed (two chapters later) in the moment of Passing (a term that originates in these very passages by Ricoeur, but a concept that is not explored there).

Memory is part of historical awareness, but is not necessarily a part of a specific inheritance (while it contributes to the construction of one's Inheritance as a system of received contents). A primary example of the compartmentalization of memory is the case of unwilling or unconscious inheritances: not only when receiving a text we may do so without a historical "memory" (or awareness) of its

¹³ Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, Ch. 1, "*Aporias of the experience of time*".

author¹⁴, but even more when refusing to acknowledge the source of an inherited content. Problematic inheritances, secret ones or mis-constructed ones all contribute to the complicated relation between knowledge/memory on one side and attribution/recognition on the other, which is inevitable when dealing with the realization of one's Inheritance.

The reaction of the inheritor to any part of his Inheritance is necessarily influenced by one's own *Weltanschauung*, but the very process of Inheritance shapes such a world-view. This is only partially addressed by the discussion about tradition: *Tradition* has been established and described always in relation to the *traditum*, and thus incorporated in theories of interpretation (which constantly refer to what is read, to the content): a shift of attention to the process in which this transmission/tradition is generated and (at the same time) received is what is now required to give a philosophical description of the matter. It is not surprising, indeed, that the philosophical study of this problem is still heavily relying on literary theory and hermeneutics that, while certainly important and somehow akin to philosophy, have a more practical approach and are more interested in explaining (or discussing the possibility of) *the right way* to receive, than in inquiring in how this receiving is even possible.

¹⁴ There can be a superficial ignorance – as in the case of an anonymous text transmitted by a tradition or school –, a mistaken knowledge – as with a wrongly attributed text – or a more profound disinterest – when interpreting a text without any care for the time or situation in which it was originated.

But could tradition be constructed as a shared inheritance? The discussion over shared inheritances is problematic, since no real sharing is possible: even hypothesizing the time and situation in which two different actors accessed the content conveyed by tradition as identical, their Inheritance as constructed until that moment would be irremediably different; thus the *process* of inheritance (if not the experience per se) would not be that of a shared reception, but only of a simultaneous (and parallel) one, albeit possibly similar. Nonetheless, the asymptotic notion of identical, shared inheritance is worth exploring to understand how the personal situation of the inheritor is brought into the fray and what of its components are relevant to the process.

There is no exclusivity of contemporaneity, when we come to inheritance: our examples, inspirations or masters can be authors belonging to the same epoch, who wrote in an overlapping time; or we can inherit contents from thinkers belonging to a line of thought (often a tradition in the usual sense). The difference between horizontal (the former) and vertical (the latter) axis of inheritances proves to be strictly intertwined with the notions of shared contents, shared inheritances and traditions: the grouping of inheritances in individual experience happens inside the construction of one's Inheritance (strictly capitalized), or philosophical system. This creates a contrast with both different instances of verticality (people who inherit from the same sources, but with different results) and with examples of tradition (which may claim to own such sources).

Inheritance is connected to our idea of history, to our process of re-composition¹⁵ of a past, which relies on the attribution of intent and importance to people (authors) who can be long dead. Our Inheritance relies on our *judgment* on them, and on their personality and historical role beyond that of author of the text or source of the idea we are considering. Most importantly, other people's judgments, a communal or traditional opinion on an author, may shape such an inheritance, at least on a descriptive level: the refusal of an *inheritee*, indeed, can happen on a superficial level (receiving and inheriting his or her ideas while rejecting any connection to him or her) or more deeply, with a rejection of certain ideas *qua* coming from an unreliable, unworthy source (or one that we consider as such). Secret inheritances and negative inheritances, nonetheless, do not stray from the model with which we inherit: i.e. they are still modes of appropriation of a cultural content *from* the past influencing our *present* philosophical system.

If Inheritance is a transformative process, contributing to the construction of our philosophical and intellectual system, we must finally ask whether this transformation is limited to ourselves or whether it can induce a modification of the "age" in which we live. A possible answer would be that, if there is transformation, it emerges from our legacy, which is transmitted to the world 'out there' with its potentiality for reception. However, since the appropriation of an inheritance, the

¹⁵ "Recomposing in retrospective" is one of the definitions of history used by Ricoeur, rewording from Bloch's *Apologie pour l'histoire* on page 30 of *Histoire et Vérité*, Paris: edition du Seuil, 1955. We will discuss this work extensively in chapter 3.

transformative process per se, always happens in the present (in the 'now' which is 'not before' and 'not yet'), it could be argued that the *status* of the present is necessarily modified as soon as our transformation is brought into being by our approach to the inherited content. Ultimately, the answer depends on the perspective we assume when dealing with the issue: a *factual* transformation is certainly happening, but the question must then become one of *cultural* or *epochal* transformation. And to this matter I will dedicate the last reflections of the chapter, distinguishing between the legacy/inheritance axis (which is strictly connected to our historicization of reality) and our action as member of a cultural milieu in the present.

While focusing on the matter of inheritance, we will be referring to the cultural contents of our Inheritance not only as present in our availability, but specifically as part of the intellectual output of other authors, both known and unknown to us. Once our exploration of Inheritance will be satisfactorily developed, we will find ourselves bound to analyze the phenomenon of Legacy, i.e. precisely this production of contents *by* an author, *at* a given time (arguably one that is different from the time of inheritance). First of all, I will address the terminological issue of the 'inheritee' (a term forged having in mind the perspective of Inheritance) as a working tool even when discussing Legacy, and define what, linguistically and philosophically, we must understand when we say Legacy (especially clarifying that it is at the same time an aggregate of contents, a personal process and the status of a content in such a process).

Analogously to Inheritance, I will discuss the temporality of Legacy, not on the basis of the particularity of a case study (e.g. “Nietzsche wrote in the 18th century”), but trying to establish the *time-frame* in which a Legacy is created with reference to the sense of time of its author, and clarify how *permanence* is the dimension of time most properly true to the process of legacy: while the single moments of creation of contents appear in the ‘present’ of the inheritee and in the ‘past’ of the inheritor, without a perception of an overarching permanence of the content the legacy would not be uttered. I will explore this intimate connection on the Bergson-Bachelard axis of duration/instant and show how both are encompassed in this notion of permanence. Some cases (nominally the talk of the madmen and the words of the mystic), -which could appear to prove problematic for this approach to the mode of time of legacy – will be explored with some more detail, dialoguing with De Certeau in addition to Gadamer and Ricoeur (who will continue to constitute the backbone of our analysis). The renovated focus on the state of mind of the inheritee that derives from such analysis of permanence will lead us to the discussion of projection of meaning, a notion introduced in chapter 3 (when with Gadamer we will discuss the inherent expectation of meaning present in every instance of interpretation) which will need to be readdressed and reversed to give account of the state of hopefulness that characterize the production of any cultural contents (in terms of hope for ‘witness’).

We must try, however, to go past the singularity of the moment of creation to try and access the inheritee as such, thus looking at his work in general and its

relation with its (potential) inheritors. This relation is often confused with Tradition, and once again we will be called to distinguish the absolutely individual axis of Legacy/Inheritance from the authority-related dimension of Tradition. In particular, we will show how speaking of tradition already involves an evaluation of legacy and a renunciation of the singularity of it. In relation to this point, we will also distinguish Legacy from the Inheritance of the inheritee: while it is true that the latter can lie at the core of the former, the two are functionally and factually distinct. In this perspective, narration (and re-narration) will emerge as crucial, since Tradition – from an individual standpoint – involves narrating oneself (and another) as belonging to the Tradition itself.

The Narration of time, in particular, is important in relation to ‘historical awareness’, that is fundamental to historiography and philosophy in Reception Theory and post-modernism alike. DeCerteau will prove useful on this matter, with his analysis of ‘structured time’ in historiography. We shall discuss what this means for the self-understanding (and self-narration) of the inheritee as the author of their own Legacy. I will also provide some examples of the relation between the author’s perception of time and the production of their legacy *in* time, also analyzing the extreme case of On Kawara, whose works of art try to encapsulate their time of creation and nothing else. While Kawara is an artist and not a philosopher, some of the insights highlighted by his work and by his critics will provide interesting stimuli for our discussion of self-narrative and bring us into the definition of

authorship in the perspective of permanence and recognition; Gadamer and Foucault will provide the theoretical frame in which to develop our analysis.

I will thus discuss recognition and recognizability as fundamental components of the ideological construction of legacy as aggregation of contents, and highlight how the theme of recognition is crucial to Western history of thought, and not only to recent philosophy of interpretation. This will lead us to discuss the connection (and difference) between recognition and identity and see how the inheritee has limited control over both. Consequently, I will discuss the rejection of a legacy and the problem of 'claim' (claim to a legacy/claim to an inheritance) that was touched upon by Gadamer but never fully explored.

The reliance on the inheritor, the hope to "make sense" and the claim to an identity as author of a legacy will prove to be crucial to the creation of Legacy itself. The co-dependence of Inheritance and Legacy (each relying on the other to be actualized) will be the starting point of my last chapter. First, I will explain how the notion of dialogue has been the model upon which Reception Theory has developed its theory of Interpretation. From there, I will show how the moment in which inheritance and legacy are generated *by each other* could initially be considered as a possible dialogue. After doing so, however, we will see how the necessary dialogue is at the same time an impossible one, in terms of both content and identity of the speakers. We will also see how this impossibility to conceive such a dialogue prevents us from thinking of a Legacy or an Inheritance as distinct, and constantly leads us to think of them only *after* they are brought to light in the moment of

Passing. I will explain how I came to define this moment as one “of Passing” and elucidate what is meant by this expression and what characteristics I recognize to the moment itself.

This ‘inconceivability’ of the moment of Passing, however, shall not become the end-point of our exploration, and I will show how a triplet of philosophers (Levinas, Derrida and Marion respectively) have discussed the philosophical notion of thinking the impossible. We will move from the ‘interior impossibility’ of Levinas to ‘undecideability’ and ‘thinking the unthinkable’ in Derrida. Finally, we will find in Marion’s ‘saturated phenomenon’ the solution to this conundrum and show how he extended this intuition beyond the theological discourse to which it is usually relegated.

After showing how we should approach the Moment of Passing as unthinkable saturated phenomenon, though, we shall consider the presence of its results in our everyday cultural life, and explore how we are able to discuss inheritance and legacy if we are not capable of really conceiving them. The solution will bring us back to the beginning of our discussion of inheritance, and therefore to the notion of Narrative, which once again will resolve – following Ricoeur – a temporal aporia, although it will be an external one and not – as in Augustine’s case – one of internal experience.

In conclusion, I will show how Ricoeur’s intuition of the stabilizing power of Narrative is in agreement with (and helps make explicit) the enigmatic notion of Play that appears in Gadamer’s work and that has been explored even outside the

field of philosophy proper. We will therefore acknowledge the inevitability of play and narration to give account of our role as actors in the interplay of cultural discourse, yet without falling back into the paradigms of Tradition and Culture as the main elements of our individual cultural action.

I hope to have mapped a route for myself and for the reader, and onto this journey we shall now embark, to try to reach our destination without losing ourselves along the way.

Chapter 1: Preliminary concerns: the history of individual transmission and the concept of Cultural Density.

The problem of cultural transmission has always been a relevant one in the study of Religion and Philosophy alike, but tradition has obscured the individual nature of this phenomenon. The stress on tradition (and *traditum* and *tradire*) as epistemological and philosophical problems has resulted into an analysis exerted over a dimension of experience that does not properly belong to the individual: *tradition* implies either a society, or a group in that society or (more customarily in the discussion about Religion, religious tradition and history of philosophy) a school of thought. So when speaking of tradition we are referring to a process that is primarily and absolutely connected to a multitude of individuals. The problem of inheritance as a personal phenomenon, enclosed in the sphere of the individual subject's cultural experience, and with a prominent role of the person who is inheriting a cultural content, has been obfuscated by this focus on the group.

What I propose to do with my dissertation and research project is twofold: first and foremost, an historical perspective is needed, in order to establish what prominent figures have conceived the problem of reception and how they approached the topic of personal cultural inheritance and the reciprocal phenomenon of Legacy. I plan to show how these formulations have never completely satisfied the need for a phenomenological description of inheritance and

legacy, lacking the conception of inheritance as a phenomenon intertwined with but independent from tradition, and shaped by personal initiative (both conscious and unconscious) in a way that tradition is not and is not supposed to be.

Beside this historiographical and descriptive step of my research, a constructive step will become necessary: to categorize Inheritance and Legacy in a phenomenological sense, bracketing out all contingencies that we normally attach to such phenomena and removing the preconceptions that words related to the linguistic family of tradition suggest. The questions to be answered are important ones if we want to discuss the personal dimension of culture: what is inheritance in its phenomenological core? What is legacy? How are they related or, most importantly, even possible?

First of all, Inheritance and Legacy, which are almost synonyms in everyday language, are not truly synonymous. They are used interchangeably, but their proper meaning would be quite distinct, according to their etymology and to the dictionary: Inheritance is described as “a thing that is inherited” (obviously), and inheriting as “receiving something” (New Oxford American Dictionary). The focus is on the receiver, and on the (only apparently passive) act of appropriating something coming from elsewhere. This sets Inheritance apart from Legacy, which is strictly “a thing handed down by a predecessor”; there is therefore a correspondence, but absolutely no coincidence, despite the confusion caused by expressions like ‘grandpa’s inheritance’, which should be constructed as ‘grandpa’s *legacy*’ if we want to refer to what the progenitor has left behind him.

The two phenomena are strictly related, reciprocally dependent, and specular: they mirror each other and they share a particular moment in which, as we will see, both are generated, at the same time and which constitutes a paradoxical problem, given that Inheritance and Legacy depend on each other as reciprocal primary causes. This moment, in which a cultural content passes from the general cultural milieu of an author into our own system of philosophy is at the same time *le point de départ* and the final destination of the transmission of such content; it is in this moment of encounter that *traditio* needs to be phenomenologically thematised as Inheritance and Legacy, since *traditio* itself has failed, as a concept, to account for this moment, as we shall see in particular in chapter 3 and 4.

Legacy is meant as the cultural product (composed of one or many – or one *and* many – cultural contents) of an author (the inheritee, in contrast with the receiving inheritor), which is consigned to the public and taken away from the control of the author himself. This system of contents potentially survives the physical author and, most importantly, is projected *out-there* (in the Heideggerian sense), ready to be received and interpreted. Anything an author writes is susceptible of becoming his Legacy, often beyond the scope of his own intentionality. It must be noted, however, that one's Legacy is perceived as the totality of contents transmitted *by* him AND received *by* someone else. This creates a dual and ambiguous relationship between legacy and inheritance, with the former being a requisite for the latter, but at the same time depending on it for its own

realization. This paradoxical tension constitutes the peculiar nature of the moment of Passing¹ and is one of the main features of such a phenomenon.

Inheritance indicates the correlated act of receiving a content making it part of one's own cultural and philosophical system. Inheritance is not just memory, or anamnesis, but is a constructive process, which stems directly from what is accessible in the scope of the inheritor's cultural milieu; it includes, but it is not completed by, the interpretation of a content (be it a text, a picture, a performance, or any other form of cultural expression), to which follows a reflection based on historical awareness (an awareness of the reciprocal position in history of the inheritor and of the inheritee – the individual whose work is inherited). It is, as we shall see, first and foremost an act of reconstruction through narrative, which transforms the inheritor, the content, and their dependence on the inheritee.

Kantian philosophy, with its founding ambition of being a Copernican revolution, was supremely interested in how we receive data via our intuitions and

¹ Passing is, on itself, a word with a focused history, which stems from Ricoeur: in *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, vl. 1, p.8 and ff.) he shows how Passing is the core of our experience of time. If time is 'what passes', it is only our conceptualization which allows us to substitute the Passing with the Present and thus understand time as a structured three fold present (Past-Present, Present-Present and Future-Present) which constitutes the basis of our understanding of temporality, and thus enables us to advance towards our idea of history. Passing is the absolute immediacy of temporal phenomenon, which becomes *something else* (the threefold present in Ricoeur's Narrative, Inheritance and Legacy in our exploration) only when reflected upon.

how we synthesize them through concepts, in order to achieve our comprehension of reality. Such an epistemology was focused on the subject, and, while giving an innovative account of time and space as pure intuitions, it was less suitable for an analysis of historical time as independent from individual consciousness and thus for the discussion of the problem of transmission of concepts through a chronological gap.

Nonetheless, we cannot underestimate the influence of Kantian philosophy on the topic: particularly relevant for our topic will be the reflection on the matter carried out by Fichte who, in *Characteristics of the Present Age*, was the first Kantian philosopher to give a solid description of the problems of transmission of ideas through time. In particular, as we shall see in Chapter 3, he addressed the contrast between the sphere of individual thinking and *common thought*, prefiguring Bergson's notion of common sense; he described in detail his notion of Ages and Epochs not as arbitrary divisions of history, but as stages in human social *and* individual development in which the individual could be ahead or behind the cultural moment of his peers.

Similar intuitions had been present in the works on the matter by Herder, a few decades earlier, but Fichte was more successful in integrating the individual dimension of the thinker with the notion of Bildung that had been at the core of the 18th century discourse on history. Benefiting from a unified perspective (dedicating an entire cycle of lectures – the above mentioned *Characteristics*), and thanks to his notion of certain enlightened individual capable of “advancing” their Age, he is able

to provide a useful description of the interaction between Authors and the “culture” of their upbringing (*Bildung*) and of their ‘circles’.

Schelling as well, while not dealing directly with the problem of transmitting ideas through time, gives a wonderful description of what he addresses as *Mitwissenschaft*. Such a co-knowledge of creation is forged by the passing of the present into past and grounds the possibility of a future. The most important aspect of it, though, is that it is participated by individual subjects conceived as a series of individuals and not (as in some critical parts of Fichte’s analysis) as a mass-phenomenon. Given the less focused nature of his work and the less direct interest in the transmission of ideas *through time*, he will be less relevant to our exploration.

The most important theorists for my research, however, belong to the 20th Century. Hermeneutics and reception theory on the one hand and Phenomenology on the other will provide the philosophical frame and the methodology needed to lead us to any significant result.

Ricoeur and Gadamer, in particular, with their interest in how we receive a text, engaged issues very close to those on which my research is focusing. They both gave fascinating accounts of what is involved in the process of interpretation, with Ricoeur focusing on our approach to the text *per se* and Gadamer advocating cultural awareness as crucial to our interpretation of a text. Their modern theory of hermeneutics (referred to by the loose term of ‘Reception Theory’) was an evolution with respects to famous predecessors like Schleiermacher and Dilthey, although Gadamer was more thorough in recognizing (and discussing) this kind of critical

inheritance. Ricoeur's account of Narrative as a mode of understanding time and Gadamer's notion of play as model for the interaction between subjects in Art will be present throughout my work, and an important part of our discussion of attention, content and interpretation was born in dialogue with their texts.

Nonetheless, they unfortunately stopped short of a proper phenomenological investigation of these issues for reasons that are different and specific to the two. Ricoeur's interest in the text *per se* and in the idea of the text becoming autonomous (with a *death of the author* in a Barthes's sense) did not provide the conditions for an account of the value of Legacy: if the text is irremediably detached from us as soon as it is uttered, how can we construct a concept of Legacy that is meaningful in the sense of a projection of our being into the Present-Future?

Gadamer, instead, could have had a philosophical system suitable to include a theory of Inheritance and Legacy, but the main focus of his magnum opus *Truth and Method* was the identification of aesthetical consciousness with historical consciousness and thus the shift from the topic of historical transmission to those of experiential and aesthetic reception of contents. Moreover, both Gadamer and Ricoeur take the possibility of receiving someone else's text and/or ideas as a given and inquire the *how* and not the possibility *per se* of this phenomenon. They are already in a contingent frame. To move forward on the path they designed and traced, and overcome the difficulties that these limitations comport, I will resort to the methods of phenomenology.

Husserl, in various places of his work and most importantly in his late work *The Crisis of European Sciences*, stresses the importance of the historical dimension of individual experience; nonetheless he does not focus on the production and reception of contents: the history he is speaking of is first and foremost a history of experience, not a history of speculation, nor one of intellectual concepts.

Heidegger's first main work (*Being and Time*) is focused on primary presence, and thus less interested in history than the late Husserl, and provides us with fundamental tools with his depiction of the They as something that is *out there*. There are two characteristics of this elaboration preventing the They from being the completion and the sole tool of our categorization of inheritance and legacy. On the one hand, the They is absolutely and irremediably inauthentic; I believe that, especially in an age as rich as ours with data, cultural contents and information, perceiving the individual as authentically incapable of inheriting from the *out there* is a methodological error. On the other hand, the They is characterized by idle talk and here is the tension that I want to expose and make central to my work. When the They and the out-there-ness of the potential intellectual content are inherited, the projection must become present if we want those intellectual contents to become actual in our cultural and philosophical system

The most interesting successors of Husserl and Heidegger, for our topic, are the so-called French Phenomenologists, in particular Derrida, Levinas, Henry and

Marion. Derrida, while not properly a phenomenologist (as he states²), has been in dialogue with such a school and provides useful insights through his theory of deconstruction, which is fruitfully applied to the problem of the text and in particular in a small book like *The instant of my death*³ he gives us interesting suggestions in order to approach the problem of what happens to our experience when it is transformed into an intellectual content to be passed on.

Levinas is the father of what has been called ‘the philosophy of the Other’⁴ and, while his work will only become important towards the end of my dissertation, his intuitions on the absolute inconceivability of the encounter with the Other will provide the starting model for a description of the moment of passing, the diachronic encounter between the past inheritee and the future inheritor in a present that does not properly belong to either of them.

Marion, though, could be the most important thinker for my aims: his notion of ‘saturated phenomenon’ could provide the key for the analysis of the moment of

² «I am also for the suspension of the horizon, but, for that very reason, by saying so, I am not a phenomenologist anymore. I am very true to phenomenology, but when I agree on the necessity of suspending the horizon then I am no longer a phenomenologist.» Derrida and Marion, “On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion. Moderated by Richard Kearney”, in John D. Caputo, Michael J. Scanlon, *God, the Gift and Post-Modernism*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 66.

³ Maurice Blanchot, Elizabeth Rottenberg, and Jacques Derrida. *The Instant of My Death*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2000.

⁴ Cf. in particular Adriaan T. Peperzak, and Emmanuel Lévinas. *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*. West Lafayette, Ind: Purdue University Press, 1993, Introduction.

passing, that particular and philosophically fecund moment in which Legacy is generated by the attentive presence of an inheritor and an inheritance is generated in the presence of the inheritee⁵. This codependence, both ontological and chronological, creates a paradoxical tension that, if not considered as something transcending our capacity for categorization, cannot be grasped, and this is the main reason for which western philosophy has failed to give an account of Inheritance and Legacy as individual, absolute and primary phenomena.

Other important figures for my work will be modern philosophers (Frenchmen, for the greatest part) who belong more or less properly to the vast array of thinkers labeled as “post-structuralists” or “post-modernists.” Among them, the most relevant one will prove to be Foucault, Deleuze, De Certeau and Barthes (beside the already mentioned Derrida). We will go into the details of their relevant work in chapter 3 and 4, but there is no doubt that their discussion of the role of the author (and of the historiographer) as part of a narrative have been important to the development of my exploration.

Obviously, other authors (both philosophers and artists) will become prominent while we go along, but they will be either ‘summoned’ by the thinkers here pre-presented, or will be used to clarify a concept emerging from their works, and I hope to have given the reader an idea of my general frame of reference at the beginning of my analysis.

⁵ The *inheritee* is the author of the original content, the protagonist of the process of legacy and the one to be ‘inherited’ as content-origin.

When we approach the problem of inheritance, we must decide whether to focus on the phenomenon at first and then explain how it is applicable to the content or vice versa to take a leap to the content itself and from there to come back to the process of inheriting as a phenomenon. The first hypothesis would be methodologically sounder from a phenomenological perspective, but the idea of inheritance as something primeval and conceptually antecedent to content is unfamiliar to our conception of the world, to the point that in common discourse pointing out how some cultural content is received and not already owned can prove confusing and be reduced to the reality of the shared knowledge of a social group or of a school of thought; we may struggle, therefore, when trying to tackle the phenomenon directly, and this was indeed the prime cause for this investigation of mine on the topic.

So at first we must try to define what a cultural content is because it is sure that if we want to speak of intellectual and cultural inheritance (or Legacy for that matter), detaching ourselves from the dimension of physical inheritance, we need to separate the realm of content constructed as an intellectual object from the mere data which are conveyed through the same method (namely, language and text) but are not meant to be addressed speculatively but only factually: we do not inherit a grocery shopping list, while we do inherit significant works of literature and, even more specifically, we receive certain archetypes and contents and narrative devices which are condensed in one and many pieces of literature.

Going back to the content, we should define it as a complex idea in the Lockean sense. Locke defines simple ideas as not purely transmittable. He writes that every man is conscious that he thinks, and applies this thinking to ideas (*Essay concerning human understanding*, II.1). He then goes on, since he is interested to in determining the origin of the ideas per se, a different aim from the one we are pursuing here. We have to step away from his inquiry into simple ideas and try to deal with his brilliant analysis of complex ideas, which he defines in terms of relations. The combination of irreducible simple ideas (self evident notions and sensual retentions) is the source of complex ideas. While the Lockean notion of complex idea can apply to something far simpler than what we are trying to get to in our search for content (ranging from the simple notion of an object as a collection of accidents), his model is still precious in analyzing the notion of a content. He points out that any complex idea is built upon three moments: combination, relation, and abstraction; these moments are crucial to the formation of cultural contents as well.

Most of our speculative thinking, even more so in our cultural experience of Art, narration and more generally in experiences without a practical and functional teleology, is expressed in terms of combinations. Any story is a combination of subjects/characters and events, but the style of the author and the rhythm of the narration are, as well, part of the combination: we cannot have a cultural content with a monolithic simple idea, since that would only be a nugget of a fact. Moreover, anything monolithically constructed (the “idea of a stone” would be a particularly fitting example) cannot be fruitfully inherited, but only duly passed on.

The second step is Relation: when we receive something from someone else we usually inherit an established relation and connection between the elements forming such a content: in inheriting the Founding Fathers' political discourse about state and citizen, maintaining the same relation between the two is the only way to truly inherit such a content; this will be immediately obvious if, in a sort of thought-experiment, we combine that two elements (State and Citizen) in a new relation (with the first holding all the power and all the rights over the second): this would immediately create a rupture and, indeed, disprove our claim of having inherited such a content from the Founding Fathers. Relation between the combined elements becomes the fundamental definition allowing us to distinguish whether two contents are merely *talking about* the same thing or if they are indeed the same content (which, we will see, can itself be modified by entering into a relation with more contents).

To be clear, this does not mean that only reproducing the content verbatim is a way to inherit: we do not conceive professors teaching Philosophy 101 as an instance of inheritance (despite the fact that their teaching can be constructed as reliant on a plethora of inheritances, which contribute to their ability to teach such a class). This highlights how the relation amongst the elements of a content is a topical point in our effort to identify a certain content as distinguished from others and at the same time to distinguish amongst mechanical (or at least not innovative) repetition and a new elaboration of the content with the aim of providing a new approach to it: through new explorations of the relation new content is produced

and whether this is part of a process of inheritance or not is a different matter from the problem at stake here, namely the definition of cultural content.

The third element in Locke's analysis of complex ideas is Abstraction: this is immediately obvious in the case of Philosophical discourse, but it needs to be fully understood in order to become a part of our conception of the content-transmission. No observable object, much less the description of an object, can be factually transmitted. A form of abstraction immediately intervenes. We could argue that, since language is necessary to the mind to think⁶, our thinking a complex idea (and our being conscious of thinking it) is already an abstraction. This, far from constituting a problem, establishes the cultural content as (at least partially) independent from the factuality it may have originated from. Even contents referring to a physicality are abstracted in order to be retained and meaningful

⁶ This holds true at least from the point of view of modern continental philosophers, whose standpoint I will be following in this dissertation. On the matter, Gutting – summarizing Derrida – writes: «Derrida argues that even if, for example, we were contemporaries of Plato, speaking directly with him, there would still be unresolvable unclarities simply because of the limitations of language in general. [...] I can always recourse to the “inner speech of thought”, which will present my thought to myself. But to this Derrida responds that the very fact that I am using a language to express my thoughts introduces the possibility of misunderstanding: the language is not my creation [...] but a socially produced structure the meaning of which may escape me (even regarding the claims I am making to myself).» Gary Gutting. *Thinking the Impossible. French Philosophy since 1960*. Oxford: University Press, 2011, p. 152. Gutting follows Derrida's 1967 article “Différance”, in *Margins of Philosophy*, tr. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982, 1-27. This view on language appears to be shared (and certainly is not contested explicitly) by all Derrida's major interlocutors, and by Reception Theorists and French Phenomenologists alike.

transmitted. Only things that are fixed in a cultural content can become inheritable or prove themselves as suitable objects of legacy, and this is only possible after a certain degree of abstraction.

The content can become structured and conceived either as a text or as the content of a text. A text or a corpus of work could then be a content per se or a meta-content, and there are methodological benefits in both of these approaches, but for the purpose of our investigation we should try to account for both. Even when we deal with a text we must keep in mind that the focus is not on the language or on an intra-textual interpretation but more on what receiving and transmitting such a content means, beside the internal (and conjuncture-related) meaning of the text as a self standing object of knowledge. Therefore, any reflection on the medium of the text must be a function of the problem of transmission and remain marginal to our discussion of the role of the content.

The first question on the nature of the content that we should ask is whether the content should have limits and, on the other hand, whether and how much the content can be fragmented before losing its recognizability as a cultural content. There is certainly a limit of fragmentability: a short text can still be a content, and likewise even a meaningful part of a sentence can be one, but words per se are not usually cultural contents but the mean, and the vehicle for the expression of such a content. If it is true that language discloses a world, in Gadamer's sense,⁷ we cannot

⁷ Palmer summarizes this most efficiently when noting how «Gadamer chooses the concept of disclosure. Language discloses our world, not our environmental scientific world, but our

ignore the fact that at the level of single words the content-idea can break down. Notable exceptions exist: an innovative or meaning-charged word can become a content per se, but it is the meta-text, be it an explanation, a consuetude or a tradition, which actually carries the burden of meaning and the content crystallized in the single word is actually broader than the graphic sign or the sound representing that word in language.

Defining how much a content can be fragmented would be an herculean task, since the possible cases are endless (quite literally, since they augment in number while we write about them), but the opposite, the upper limit, is undeterminable even on a philosophical level. Since, as we explained, combination and relation are the determining factors in the characterization of a cultural content, the permutation of the same elements can spiral in an infinite series of content and meta-discourse about content, becoming in turn another content to be discussed. We can transmit a content with something as short as a sentence (or a meaningful word, as said above) but we can similarly describe the entirety of the work of an

lifeworld.» [Richard E. Palmer. *Hermeneutics; Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969, p. 205] Gadamer discusses this all though Part III chapter 3 ('Language as horizon of a hermeneutic ontology') of *Truth and Method*, pp. 397-448. Among others, this passage is striking: «Our own language world, this world in which we live, is not a tight enclosure that hinders the knowing of things as they are; rather, it encompasses basically everything which our insight is able to broaden and lift up [...] The world is always human, and this means a linguistically created world.»

artist (e.g. Picasso's cubism intended as a consistent content), a philosopher or a theologian as something to be transmitted and received.

Can something, which is fragmentable to a variable degree and expandable to virtually infinite magnitudes, be conceived? The answer is that not only it is possible, but that we do as much every day, since we are constantly immersed in a language in which expressions like ideas, cultural ideas, cultural tradition appear necessarily. Our experience as individuals in a society and in a cultural tradition is inseparable from our encounter with the concept of cultural content. Recognizability, then, becomes a discriminating factor in our conceptualization of contents in a cultural transmission paradigm: but we should not confuse content with transmission and inheritance.

The content is something inert, which may become the constituting core of a Legacy and be received as an object in an inheritance, but it is static and not the subject (but only the object) of change. We must understand that the content comes into being before interpretation and it is thus different from the text hermeneutically understood, which comes into being for the reader in and after the interpretative process.

Content may be received and become part of an Inheritance, but it can be rejected as well, possibly giving birth to a phenomenon of negative inheritance, and since this happens without the content per se being transformed (being fixed in a static form), it is clear that it is not the content per se to constitute an inheritance, but an attentive act is required to enter it *into* one. While it is true that we can never

read twice the same content in the same way, we can indeed read twice the same content in its independent form. It is the reader (and thus the very process of reading) who is changing, disclosing a possible re-interpretation or re-reception of the content-text.

Dilthey can help us begin our inquiry, with the description of the *historical milieu* that he provides in *The Rise of Hermeneutics*: going back to Schleiermacher, he states that the individuality of the exegete and that of the author (which is removed from the content) are not opposed: they are both formed upon what he calls the «substratum of human nature»⁸ (*der Grundlage der allgemeinen Menschennature*) and he says that the interpreter is projecting his own “sense of life” into another historical milieu. This is key to the process of “recreation”⁹, which according to Dilthey is the fundamental feature in any process of interpretation and understanding. This is the potential innovation that is however partially lost in the work of Dilthey, who does not explore this further. To him, historical milieu constitutes a clear self-standing concept and he is thus not interested in dissecting it further, in going to its conceptual roots.

Let us analyze further this fertile concept of historical milieu. It is *historical* in that it relates to the chronological position of an individual (be it the subject individual who is performing the interpretation of the text or the object-individual

⁸ Dilthey, “The Rise of Hermeneutics”, trans. Federic Jameson, *New Literary History*, 3, no. 2 (1972): 229-244, p. 243.

⁹ See “The Rise of Hermeneutics”, note above, for a detailed description.

author which is no more active but reduced to the voice that has spoken before but is now silent¹⁰) in a succession of men and groups of men. Milieu reminds us of the immersion we have been discussing for the last few pages. The milieu is around us and does not change from person to person. We are in a milieu, and we can move in that milieu without changing it. This historical milieu is certainly a cultural concern: Dilthey is not referring to technology. It is possible that after McLuhan¹¹ we can hardly separate an imaginary “human pure culture” from the reality of the technology of the world we live in any more; nonetheless, Dilthey focuses on the cultural dimension (in terms of knowledge and expression of such knowledge) of our world, which is intertwined but not coincident with our technological level.

How, then, is this cultural world constructed? This is another problem with Dilthey's definition: cultural milieu always assumes a group at large, sharing or at least participating in the same culture. If the interpreter projects his own sense of life (which appears to be personal), he projects it into a cultural milieu, which belongs to *a time*, not to *an individual* (the time of the author is not personal to the author: other individuals live in that time and share the culture of the silenced

¹⁰ It is indeed interesting how for the text to speak, we need the author to be silent. Interpreting the text is cutting out the *viva voce* of the one who wrote it, who becomes a factor, a condition for the object-text and not a subject in any understanding of the word.

¹¹ Cf. in particular Marshall McLuhan. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962. I will not delve into McLuhan's theories, here. However, in this masterpiece of his, McLuhan highlights a relation between the artist's culture's technological level and his own artistic production, and shows how ‘intellectual’ and ‘artistic’ progress cannot be dissociated from advancements in *techné*.

author of the to-be-interpreted content). While it is true that the individual has access to his time, this milieu is not 'directly' his, but only derivatively (since he has no primary access to it, and must discover it in the interaction with the 'others' who crowd his time). The cultural milieu is clearly intended as a shared reality, determined by time and, at most, geography; the individuals moving into it share it, with it being the *same* to them and remaining relatively *same* in the time of their life. We must remember that, to Dilthey, the *cultural milieu* of the author is the one of *his time* intended as a general moment in history, not the one of the particular author-subject at the moment of writing.

These shared elements, then, are part of what I define as cultural density: it is an expression that needs to substitute the notions of Culture and even *historical milieu* when dealing with individual experiences. First of all, our cultural density is a constantly changing reality, with nothing of the monolithic stability of culture: it changes not with *historical* evolution but with the personal experience of time. My cultural density is not today what it was two years ago and is not yet the same as it will be in a few years. Every time a content is encountered, our cultural density mutates, becoming denser: it is defined as the *total sum of potential inheritances available to us that we could, with an act of attention, bring to life as our actual inheritances*.

Cultural density is always and absolutely individual. We do not share any part of it, despite the fact that certain contents can and will appear in a multitude of individual cultural densities. This is not only because of our differences in

inclination and approach, since these come into account only when the content is actualized as an inheritance through interpretation: interpretation comes after our possibility to access the content and cannot thus shape our cultural density. The irreproducibility of cultural density lives in the impossibility of having access to the very same sum of contents. Interestingly enough, the more interested and open we are to otherness, the less likely it becomes that we can have a significant overlapping of our cultural density and someone else's one: vice versa, having access to the least possible variety of cultural contents (e.g. in the reality of a small and enclosed community) brings forward a higher level of coincidence between different cultural densities inside such a reality. Cultural density is something that is always already there; it predates us and defines our approach to the cultural world.

We must inquire, though, about how these contents become available and present themselves to us. Our cultural density is the subset of content in our culture at large which, by virtue of accessibility, constitute potential inheritances for our individual and subjective cultural and philosophical system (with all the possible declinations in terms of ethics, religious and political views) but we are left to wonder where these contents come from. It is clear that they cannot come from our inheritor-self, since for us to encounter the contents as otherness and to integrate them into something-our (our Inheritance as the system of all received inheritance-s) they must necessarily find their origin elsewhere than from us; this elsewhere is always already there: while we can sometimes track down the historical origin of a single cultural content, it is impossible to imagine a human being (as part of a

human race and of a subset of human culture) devoid of any degree or layer of cultural density.

No matter how small the network of content accessible to the individual, something is always already there to be received in a cultural sense. From the oral tradition, the ballads and the teaching of wisdom in non-urbanized oral cultures to the vast interdisciplinary interaction of post-modern and internet-connected modern western society, 'no man is an island' as Donne so beautifully summarizes, so aptly in an age (the 17th century) in which the world is beginning to come together in a more unified way. It is not by chance that in the central part of the poem (far less famous than the incipit or the excipit) he speaks of continent and Europe as a unity which is found in any of its inhabitants:

Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.

We are not islands, then, because mankind is already there and we are faced with at least a part of it. Something is always *already there* and we cannot imagine a man without an array of previous contents to be inherited. Adam, the first man, could very well be an exception, but even then the word of God would be present to him to receive and live by. It could be argued that he receives such a word directly

and personally, without any cultural system (and even less any cultural density) to speak of. But we are not Adam, we live and think in a world of post-Babelian language, in which the distinctiveness of our cultural density is inescapable and undisputable.

We are left wondering, then, what this *out there* in which the sum of our inheritable contents is to be found can be. We found them *out there*, predating our decision of focusing on them, but how are they there?

Heidegger (Being and Time, 1927) provides a precious description of the They (*das Man*) as characterized by Being-there-too (*Auch-da-sein*) as a collection of Others. He then redefines the Being-in-the-world of the Dasein as a Being-with-other (*Mit-dasein*)¹². Heidegger points out how these Others are «encountered from out of the world, in which concernfully circumspective Dasein essentially dwell» (1927, p 121/157).

In our experience of the world, language is the immediate medium via which we understand such a world: Gadamer in *Truth and Method* clearly shows how language is not ex-post but a primary phenomenon, which is impossible for us not to experience when living in this world. The Heideggerian They, therefore, proves itself unsuitable to our effort of localization of the 'where' of our cultural density, even

¹² The notion of mit-dasein recalls Schelling's mit-wissenschaft, especially since both rely on the constructive power of imagination for the disclosure of a 'common' world shared with others. On the matter, see in particular Christopher S. Yates. *The Poetic Imagination in Heidegger and Schelling*. London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2013.

more so when Heidegger stresses the inauthenticity of Idle Talk, which contains everything that is uttered by the They.

We are, therefore, always already immersed in a world rich with contents, whose potentiality as inheritances (and more generally as received texts, instead of mere contents) is disclosed through language and offered to us simultaneously (while, as we mentioned and will see later, inheritance is always a process fully localized in time) in a plurality of presentations. Heidegger's presentation as the They-I is problematic for the analysis of culture, so it may be fruitful to revert to Buber and the I-Thou Nature of Man.

Buber is quite clear that the wholeness of Being (or, we shall say, relational Being) is always contained in the I-Thou relation and never in the I-It, quite the opposite of the notion of authenticity with which the I-to-present-at-hand relation is imbued in Being and Time. The I-Thou, is the all-comprehensive location of experience. It encompasses, therefore, more than what we are looking for here.

We must also argue whether the I-Thou, so focused on the non-It nature of the Thou, can be applicable to the content which, while expression of an Other (constructible as a Thou) is not, per se, an-Other, but only another discourse; nonetheless, Buber describes the realm of experiences as gravitating around sphere of Relations, and one of them is that of intelligible forms. Buber explains how we never experience a Thou, but we are always in a relation with it: in this sphere, the content could be re-instated in our realm of experience as the underlying relation not to a Thou, but to a They. A new and different (non-Heideggerian) They, that is

re-disclosed through our openness to the contents, a pre-openness which is a relation (their relation to us in terms of availability, our relation to them in terms of intelligibility – we know they are, and we know we can access).

The true relation by which cultural density and the contents are informed, thus, becomes a I-You/They (with the plural You substituting the singular Thou) relation, which is always potential and ready to be actualized into an I-Thou experiential instant, in which the projection of the I onto one content, via a moment of attention, breaks the collective nature of the You/They summoning the Thou of the Other, the authored text which implies the authoring author (but not necessarily the historical author, which is often eclipsed, as both Ricoeur and Barthes emphasize).

This shifts require, consequently, a re-imagining of Buber's supreme relation, in which presence (of the content in the cultural density of the I and of the authoring Other in the content(s)) substitutes grace: the meeting is no more primary, but always happens *after* the presence, a potentiality of meeting which is always already there. The *living is meeting* formula is shifted into a condition of meeting *because* living in a world of discourse, where the lust/theory is secondary and its collapse unnecessary: potentiality for understanding comes before potentiality for wanting, since we cannot want without thinking the thing that we want, and in accessing our thinking we access discourse, which in turns makes our cultural density possible *at the same time* in which we are understanding the world in which our object of desire is situated.

This new system of relations can overcome the diachrony between the *pastness* of the I-It (whose objects «subsist only in the time-that-has been») and the *presentness-meeting* postulated by Buber as the primary locus existentiae of the I-Thou. The crystallization of the Others into contents and the I-They/You relation disclose the possibility of a unified present-past, since if it true that «true beings are lived in the present, [while] the life of objects is in the past», the peculiar nature of the object-[cultural]content as a potential voice of an-other draws them back into the present of being, at least on a potential level.

It must be clear, though, that this is strictly in a pre-attention situation, if we want to remain true to at least the general paradigm of Buber's philosophy: any actualization of the content (through the moment of conscious attention) would break the mutual relation (of a manifold of accessible contents with an individual capable of accessing them) and transform that into a subject-object interaction, thus reverting to the I-It schema and pushing back the content into a passive and static element only there to be experienced as object of a "mean".

Moreover, only while every single content is a potential individual encounter presented to the individual already immersed into the density, can it escape its assimilation in the many-It and the "accumulation" of the It-world into the cultural history of humanity. Buber is indeed convinced that the (inauthentic?) It-world is grounded on culture but he appears to be referring to the practical aspects of such a culture (in terms of Economics and State), capable of enforcing a causality on the subject-citizen, and not on the content as access to another Being. This

interpretation (on which my elaboration on Buber is based) is reinforced by the passages of Freedom (from the many-It) which is presented to us “in the Face”: the content presents us with a face, although not necessarily an historical face – the I of the I-Thou (and of the I-They/You) is a person in communality with another person.

This localization of the contents must reconcile their nature of being always-already-there, available for us to *use* and thus ready-at-hand in the Heideggerian sense, in a way that is authentic to the Dasein immersed in a world that is no more conceived as only a place of physical tools; at the same time, the contents are such before they become inheritances or are interpreted as texts: this allows them to come before the subjugation of their implied author to the attention/aim of the subject to whose cultural density they belong, thus escaping the reduction to the It-world of the many-it that Buber depicts as robbing Man of his Nature. It is indeed a fine line, but one that needs to be traced if we want to understand what kind of relation exists between the soon-to-be interpreters and the potential objects of their interpretation.

Going back to Donne, we are *a part of the main*, but the main is there for us and for us only. The main – intended as the system of relations which I feel part of I am part of and the sum of all the ideas and contents I can have access to - is not the same main of my Neighbor or at least it is not the same main in the same way. If we were to read this main as the *milieu* once again, we would have to understand ‘every man’ not as an expression about the individual, but once again as a commentary on the role of the man as part of a group of men. In this case, Donne would be telling us

nothing (since it is evident that we live beside other men, if it is only a matter of proximity).

Our cultural density is nothing else than the human reality we are immersed in as a thinking mind: our embodiment shapes it but not fully determines it, especially in an era in which information is immediately accessible without physical constraint and absolutely pervasive, not only to the point that *Europe is the less*, but so that virtually the entire world is collapsed into accessibility at the reach of a (digital) fingertip. The reduction of distance, though, is always experienced in potentiality: there is no relation between this constantly increasing amount of information (and information about this information) and the actualization of this potential into the cultural input and output of an individual, in terms of notions, vocabulary, *prima face* experiences of different countries, etc. Thus, what is expanding is, once again, not our Culture (beside the problematic limitation of this concept I tackled earlier) but our *cultural density*.

Contents are then present in a state of accessibility, a readiness-to-mind, so to speak, which is ungrounded in Being and Time, but which is around us in our every-day experience. Cultural density is always tied to the present and expands in a fluid environment, with a model that traditional notions of Tradition and Culture fail to frame. We should be reminded, here, of Deleuze's notion of *Difference* as a model for self-modifying unstable Ideas. He writes in his *Difference and Repetition*:

The Idea of Fire subsumes fire in the form of a single continuous mass capable of increase. The Idea of Silver subsumes its object in the form of a liquid continuity of fine metal. However, while it is true that continuousness must be related to Ideas and to their problematic use, this is on condition that it be no longer defined by characteristics borrowed from sensible intuition [...] Continuity truly belongs to the realm of Ideas only to the extent that an ideal cause of continuity is determined.¹³

The model of difference is the most fitting when addressing the problem (in the “problematic” Deleuzian sense, which is one of organizing and understanding the world, with problematization becoming not an hindrance, but a resource of intellect) of *cultural density*, which as we said cannot be subject of hard limits, both horizontally (it is *slightly* different for people sharing a large number of cultural contents) and vertically (my cultural density today is built upon but not coincident with my cultural density as it was yesterday). The cause of continuity, in this case, would be the being at my disposal, in differential opposition to all those contents that are not anymore or not yet within my metaphorical and practical reach. Deleuze explains how difference is not just *diversity* or *otherness*, since it is grounded in what is shared.

The idea of culture as shared, that we had to renounce a few pages ago in face of the incompatibility with the reality of our experience, can thus be reintroduced, not anymore as something strongly coherent and cogent, but as a function and

¹³ Gilles Deleuze and Paul Patton. *Difference and Repetition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 171.

product of our personal *difference*, which is established as an expression of what Deleuze refers to as “univocal Being”; we are part of many cultures, which become therefore nothing else than subsets of our cultural density that are shared with others, to whom (and to us as well) they represent not the overarching limit of the horizon of cultural accessibility (as it was the case in the old notion of national, continental or traditional culture) but a lower limit of aggregation for a social understanding and collocation of the contents.

Interestingly enough, the German notion of *Bildung* (to which Gadamer dedicates much attention in *Truth and Method*¹⁴), often translated as Culture, includes a personal and developmental nature, which supports and helps delimiting the notion of cultural density: on the one hand, it is focused on the individual, since it includes both Culture at large (which is shared) and *formatio*/education, which is always singular and different from person to person. At the same time, though, it is always conceived as developed through time, connected to personal history and fragmented into steps of an ever-evolving process.

Bildung is the self-conscious counterpart to cultural density: when a content is accessed, it moves from it into *Bildung*; cultural density can then be understood as the outer limit of *Bildung*, constituting at the same time its *limes* and its potentiality of expansion. Hegel believed that «philosophy has in *Bildung* the condition of its

¹⁴ See in particular Part I, Section B.1

existence»¹⁵, since Bildung provides the *promotion to universality* crucial to philosophy. There is no doubt whatsoever, then, that cultural density cannot provide the condition for a mature and developed philosophizing: no surprise, though, since we have already defined it as previous to any elaboration. Potentiality, and not actualization in theory, is the core of this array of contents available to us.

Similarly useful in a negative definition of cultural density (i.e. saying what it is different from, to avoid confusions) is the notion of *sensus communis*, which Fichte and Hegel reprise from Vico and that has been a relevant notion in both Reception Theory and deconstruction. Vico's *sensus communis* is indeed acquired by living and circumstantial, just like cultural density is; it is also not thought out, but felt immediately, as a series of images of probability. However, it differs from cultural density in two main ways:

1. it is "communis", meaning that it is completely shared. The individuality is lost; its social nature is well exemplified by Bergson who writes «tandis que les autres sens nous mettent en rapport avec de choses, le bon sens preside à nos relations avec des personnes» (Ecrit et Broles, p. 8).
2. it involves judgment (although based on probability rather than on truth). This means, going back to Gadamer, that, contrary to appearance (and to Vico's explanation), it comes *after* interpretation.

¹⁵ Hegel, Georg W. F, Michael George, and Andrew Vincent. *The Philosophical Propaedeutic*. Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1986, p. 45.

It should be noted how Shaftesbury equates *Sensus Communis* with sympathy: while this takes away judgment and theorization, it also destroys the value of *sensus communis* in Vico's sense of it as a first mode of explanation of the world. If it is reduced to a sympathetic inclination to access certain "otherness-es", it can be reinstated as cultural density, but we must travel far from its original definition.

The chronological extension of *Bildung*, to which we will have to come back, is absent in the cultural density that, being unconceived and always *before* thematization, can only be felt in the "now". Temporally, indeed, my cultural density is to be understood as absolutely present. While the availability of individual contents must have been presented to us "before" the moment in which our cultural density is displayed to our mind as reachable, it is only the present situation in which we are immersed that can be relevant to our experience of the cultural/historical milieu. What is not yet available, despite its possible existence *simultaneously to* our cultural density, does not belong to it.

The possible irrelevance of a content to our intellectual system, as well, is irrelevant, since accessibility is the only condition discriminating against certain contents (those unknown to us and potentially unavailable). Immediacy is the crucial dimension: what is accessible to us immediately is not to be discovered, but only to be explored. While it is certainly true that when actualized as intellectual experiences (and inheritances) most of the contents will disclose the notion and the accessibility of further ones (thus expanding our cultural density through this disclosure, in a self-multiplying process only partially connected to our freedom of

choice), this is not part of the immediate *now* which shapes our realm of accessibility. The time of this “now” is different from the time of the reader, the interpreter and the inheritor: it precedes it and prefigures it, but is always before. My being “now” immersed in contents is shaped by what I am reading-now, but it is projected forward: what I am reading-now is constantly re-determining what I am potentially going to access “soon”.

There is a messianic quality to the sphere of the contents in the “out there”: while they are absolutely relevant (they are, after all, there to be experienced by me and conversely they limit the scope of my possible immediately future cultural experience) and define me in terms of the culture I am immersed in, they can never be completely present¹⁶. My cultural density is not my erudition (my *Building*). Contents flow constantly from one to the other, from the presence of memory and knowledge to the potential, de-personalized immediacy of availability at the reach “of a fingertip”. We say “I cannot remember” to avoid admitting “I don’t know”, afraid of the latter re-consigning the forgotten content to anonymity, ignoring the space of accessibility disclosed by cultural content: what is not alien to us, but not immediately present either. The truth is that most of what we claim to remember, we only have in our realm of availability, since genuine memorization is rare, at

¹⁶ We are reminded of the Talmudic story, in which Rabbi Joshua Levi cannot ask the Messiah anything else than “When wilt thou come Master?” (Sanhedrin 98a). Similarly, we can only wonder, about a content that abides our cultural density, “When will I access it? When will I conquer it? When will I *know* it?”

least for intellectuals of my generation, overwhelmed by the excess of information both contemporary and ancestral.

Since cultural density is the locus of contents before they are accessed, it is outside the sphere of competence of our historical consciousness; it comes before any temporal consideration. In it, voices of ages past and the most recent discussion on contemporaneity are present in the same way, since the possibility of our experiencing it is primary and divested of any consideration of historicity. In contemplating this indiscernible present (since discerning is interpreting and that belongs to the now of the reader) we must, as Voegelin aptly explains, «beware of the fallacy of transforming the consciousness of an unfolding mystery into the gnosis of a progress in time»¹⁷ (*Order and History*, v. 2 *The World of The Polis*, p. 5).

Cultural density does not ‘progress’, it is only different from anyone else’s and different from itself in the future and in the past, without any teleological constriction. Epistemologically, it comes before what Gadamer defines as the “historical ‘becoming aware’”¹⁸, the most important modern revolution and the

¹⁷ Eric Voegelin, and Athanasios Moulakis. *Order and History: Volume II: The World of the Polis*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000, p. 5.

¹⁸ The “becoming aware” or “prise de conscience” was a reprise from Ricoeur’s *Histoire et Vérité*, which had been published three years before the conferences in Louvain which constitute *Le Problème de la Conscience Historique*. In his work Ricoeur was interested mainly in what he called the “philosophical reception” of history and only addressed the “Short History of the Self” insofar as it could be rescued by the overarching “Long History of Consciousness” (Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1955, p. 39-40), and subjectivity was thus discussed only *after* the conscious (attentive) moment.

grounding of his hermeneutics. Gadamer intuited the existence of such a space, to which he hints when discussing the need of relativism to conceive the plurality of content and disengage from the *Kampf der Weltanschauungen*¹⁹. He says that before the development of historical sense, we are trapped in the basic naiveté of seeing things “just as they are” (“Problemes épistémologiques de Sciences Humaines” in *Probleme de la Conscience Historique*). However, he does not account for this naïve and immediate dimension of our access to culture, since he is worried with the establishment of historical consciousness, which is at the same time a prerequisite and a product of Hermeneutics.

The contents, not yet accessed, are suspended in a non-temporal display, since as we explained they are not yet thematised in any sort of historical milieu, which would require awareness and theorization of the contents themselves. Ricoeur is crystal clear when he explains that «time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence» (*Time and Narrative*, p. 52): it is clear that no narrative can predate our accessing the contents and the individual meaning of them is not part of one’s view of the world.

It could be argued that we arrange our access to yet-to-be-known contents in a functional manner (distinguishing, e.g., what we can access momentarily, what we need to “check” in terms of sources and what we know it exists but have no way of

¹⁹ Literally “War of Visions of the World”, but it has convincingly been translated as Culture War.

accessing, since we do not know where to look for), but this is more of a geographical, spatial, methodological categorization than it is a matter of time. Moreover, such a categorization would already be a byproduct of memory, a consequence of a choice, and thus subjected to the authority of the “I” as reader and interpreter, thus losing the immediacy of cultural density, which always comes *before* the moment of attention.

To summarize, we have seen how for a content to be inherited

- a) it needs to be, indeed, an intellectual/cultural content; we saw how contents are always defined ex-post, after having accessed them, since we lack a clear, shared and incontestable definition of what can be constructed as a cultural content, despite having a general idea of it.
- b) It needs to be accessible. We have shown how the concept of Culture (capitalized and paired with a definer, an adjective à la “American”, “academic”, “post-modern”, etc.) fails to grasp the absolute individuality of the availability of contents.
- c) It’s “out there” before being accessed. This has brought us to define the locus of the contents *qua accessible*, before interpretation.

Consequently, departing from the inauthentic They of Heidegger and from the too narrow (and post-interpretational) I-Thou of Buber, we tried to develop a place for the I-You/They dynamic and we have called such a space cultural density. We have distinguished this from Bildung and from Common Sense.

Now that we have delimited the status of the contents before interpretation, we must inquire into the mechanism by which these contents, available to us but not yet relevant, are brought into our consciousness and how they become important via a *prise de conscience*, i.e. the moment of attention.

Chapter 2: The moment of Attention.

After defining what we refer to by “content” and having explored what we call cultural density, I must now move onto the analysis of the moment of attention; attention is the necessary link (both conceptual and chronological) between the content as undistinguished potentiality in cultural density and their actualization in interpretation. In this chapter, I will address the problem of the collocation in time of the moment of attention and underline how the physical, mathematical “time of the clock” is irrelevant to our experience of attention. I will explain why it is always experienced momentarily and as a ‘now’, but also give account of the difference between this ‘now’ as a precise moment on one side and the ‘now’ of historical situation and the ‘now’ of cultural density on the other.

I will reflect on the condition of the ‘heard of’ and show how this is precisely the starting point of our possibility for turning our attention to a content. Expanding the notion of ‘hearing of’ and comparing it with the notion of ‘hearing/listening’, I will show how the moment of attention is exactly what divides the former from the latter. I will explain how Dilthey’s and Gadamer’s notion of personal sense of history as the first moment of our approach to the contents fails to give account of attention, which needs to pre-date historicization in our cultural experience.

I will also expand on the difference between attention and attentiveness, and show how the absolute instantaneous nature of the former strides with the

prolonged process constituted by the latter. I will show how attentiveness relies on attention to become actual, and therefore inquire into the nature of attention proper, in relation with both our senses and our concepts. During this exploration, I will refer to exemplar cases from Art and Literature, in order to offer the reader some examples of the presence of these themes even outside philosophy proper.

Finally, I will explain why it is hard for us to make attention the subject of our study, but why we must, nonetheless, give an account of its implications before moving into the realm of interpretation and Inheritance. I will show how the expectation-value of attention is crucial to our exerting it over an object. This notion of expectation will be important even for interpretation, and it is therefore important to discuss its role in the moment of attention that always comes first.

We have defined the space of the pre-interpreted contents (i.e. our cultural density) as a space of contemporaneity, a 'now' which is always 'before' our access to the content, while remaining in the space of our accessibility and thus being always at-the-same-time with our chronological collocation in the stream of time and with the presence of all other contents. The passing of time shapes and modifies cultural density in its components, with new potential interpretation appearing into our reach and other exiting the range of our possibilities for attention; however, it does not change the status of contemporaneity between the contents and between the contents and us, since we are always immersed in it, and it contains all the non interpreted contents at the same time.

The moment in which such contents have entered our range of potential access, their movement from elsewhere into the sphere of our cultural density, is made irrelevant as soon as it is over. The contents over which we *could* exert access (since cultural density is always in a state of potentiality, and the content is only actualised 'later') are pre-presented¹ to us without any regard for the *when* of their appearance into the range of our accessibility: their (pre-)presence in the 'now' of cultural density has nothing to do with chronological systematizations, they do not belong to history by themselves. Writing history and being written as parts of history would presuppose an interpretation; this cannot happen before a moment of representation, which can only happen through attention and can only be exerted over these pre-presented contents. These contents must therefore exist to us a-historically and, to the degree that chronological order is conceived by consciousness, a-temporally.

Insofar as we inhabit our cultural density, we are immersed in an a-temporal world, and only our state of not-interpretation of the contents tells us apart from the Tralfamadorians, the bizarre aliens of *Slaughterhouse N. 5*, which Kurt Vonnegut depicts as seeing all that has happened and has been spoken in absolute contemporaneity: they do not understand time as a discernible variation; everything

¹ This state cannot be a presentation, since they are not actually present to us. They are not read, accessed or interpreted, but are there to be made present only by an act of attention. They are not re-presented, since our consciousness is not the eminent source of them, not more than it is the source of our World at large. Nonetheless, they are in a state of pre-presentation, since they are already in the condition to be represented and made present.

is present to them in a sort of contemporaneity; yet, such a simultaneity is not one of time, since they do not conceive of time and things and events are only 'there'². We are in the same relation to the cultural contents surrounding us: they are not discernable or discerned, since the time of their author or of their source can only be disclosed at the moment and in virtue of our interpretation of what the content is and of how it is transmitted to us.

We are as much immersed in and influenced by time as originators of contents (as we will see) as we are absolutely independent from time in our inhabiting our cultural density. The possibility of reading is only dependent on the accessibility - and not on the dated-ness or novelty - of the content itself: the next, new-to-me, Euripide's tragedy can be there for us, yet-to-be-accessed, as much as the last winner of the Prix Goncourt.

This personal *now* is not, therefore, developed and expressed into the *now* of the clock, nor in the *now* of cultural awareness, although it can be influenced by the latter and certainly changes, slightly, with the movement of the first. 'Internal time'³, arguably the locus of such a *now*, appears to have a varying influence on this

² While the Tralfamadorians have a spatial and geographical 'human' idea of 'there', the 'there' of our cultural density is just a phenomenological state of being out of our consciousness and in the world, and not a 'there' marred by any physical notion of 'place', which can only come to us after the contents are interpreted and connected to physical location (usually that of its author, or the place where it was written, etc.).

³ In the meaning that this assumes in Bergson, as opposed to time of the clock. Cf. Bergson, Henri, and Frank L. Pogson. *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. New York: Harper, 1960.

contemporaneity. If accessibility were determined by physical considerations (which it is less and less with the advent of expanded digital information), it would be conceivable that geographical and spatial considerations could shape the temporality of this 'now' more than chronological succession of events.

Even if we assume absolute, non-geographically determined accessibility (which in a certain way constitutes the perfect hypothesis for our discussion, since it allows us to focus on the availability of contents per se more than on the circumstances of their being at our reach), living, passing time is not a part of our cultural density, although the opposite can be true, since the status of one's cultural density could be theoretically determinable (if we imagined absolute information) at a given time T . However, only a new determination at a time T' could inform us on the status of the same person's cultural density at that time T' , since the mere passing of time from T to T' gives us no means of determining modifications in the availability of contents.

The moment of attention destroys this absolute now in which we are immersed and which informs our relation to the not yet interpreted contents, breaking their simultaneity and bringing a fraction of our cultural density to the forefront of our consciousness. Time erupts on the scene in a threefold scheme.

First, cultural density is modified, thus moving to a relative T' , which witnesses a different cultural density, immediately reduced (since the content we accessed is not not-accessed anymore) and likely expanded (since most access to a content discloses more potential accessibility, thus increasing our cultural density).

This time T' is not per se taken into account in cultural density, since to us that remains always in a state of 'right now' ('right now I am not interested in' or 'I do not know of...' which implies a '...right now'). However, this 'now' is the 'now' of a consciousness (with its relative cultural density) that is immersed in a time T' and, given the hypothetical absolute information we assumed above, could be seen as different from what it was before. Time acts *on* our cultural density, despite not being active *in* it beyond this impression of simultaneity.

Second, the content is suddenly fixed in time, thrown in a timeline and redefined as written "before" and read "at this moment": not only it differentiates itself from all the other contents of the subject's cultural density, it also acquires a status of temporal collocation which is different from other instances of the same content as read/accessed in other times, by other subjects. The very fact of being actualised, of moving from the status of *accessible* content to that of *accessed* one, gives the content a place in time, or at least a new moment in the history of its being accessed. If in the personal history of the accessing subject the content only exists "from now on", it exists so with a history: from now on the subject will have already accessed the content that was accessed today, and this content is the one that was accessed *at least also* today.

Thirdly, the time of the subject is marked, his/her history is pinpointed at least temporarily, and until the memory of the content fades away from his/her mind the subject's personal chronology now contains the moment of attention in which such a content has been accessed. The now of the cultural density is shattered

for a moment, and the now of the subject's attention is there to be remembered. The content is accessed *at this time* and was not before, and it is accessed by the subject, who conversely accesses it *at this moment in time* and *not before*.

None of these temporalizations, these appearances of time, coincides with History or with the time of the clock: History is not made of and by the moment of attention, which is by its nature absolutely individual and impossible to narrate, since it discloses interpretation but is not, yet, interpretation. History needs historical awareness in order to be constructed, and the moment of attention is the source of such awareness, but precedes it and is not susceptible to it: we cannot historicise the moment of attention but only (possibly) the interpretation that came from and after it, since before attention there is nothing to be accounted for on which to exercise attention, if not potentiality of content. A history of moments of attention would be nonsensical if it were to be anything else than a history of the interpretations these moments gave rise to, since it would have no content to be discussed, no time to be named and no object in discourse (since attention is always immediate and precedes discourse). Moreover, History is not *interested*, is not attentive, only the subject is, since the moment of attention is absolutely personal, as we shall see.

On the other hand, while the clock can register the time of the moment, the clock itself is oblivious and irrelevant at the same time. 'He read of Napoleon at a very young age and was inspired' or 'After reading Tolstoy I moved on to Dostoevsky' are not statements about the time of the clock, but relative to the

internal time of the reader, and even so only relevant in a relational space (*after, then, again, not on Friday or at noon*). Moreover, the clock is never read, since the attention is natürlich devoted to the content; after all that is the very reason for the moment of attention as we define it. Mathematical, objective time is pushed to the background, the time of attention is tautologically only the time in which we access the content, and it relies only on our psychological and living state to define itself in a chronology of similar absolutely individual moments.

This status of conflicted temporality is part of the reason for which defining such a moment is not immediate to consciousness: the moment of attention is always immediately after a defined status of cultural density and at the same time immediately before interpretation. Nonetheless, the two segments of times that it separates are not homogeneous; the time from which and after which the moment of attention emerges is a static and contemporaneous time of a-historicity, one in which all the contents exist qua accessible and devoid of *their* time, since such a time can only be given to them by the interpretation which is yet to happen. Conversely, the time of interpretation is a dynamic, processing time: interpretation is never static, it constantly moves, and its time, both perceived and 'on the clock' is a time of progress and constant change. Interpretation 'happens' at a specific time in the subject's personal history, while cultural density simply 'is there' and is only defined temporally by its simultaneity, internal and with the consciousness of the subject who lives it as the 'now' in which he is immersed.

The moment of attention, therefore, carries in itself a tension that prefigures that of the moment of Passing, to which attention is crucial but which is not exhausted in the attention itself (since it involves historicization and awareness, but we will get to this later); it needs to stem from a passive, potential, non historical, absolute individual 'now' where no language is (yet) spoken and where all cows are potentially black. But it gives rise to the actualization of interpretation, which is grounded in language, discloses a world to our consciousness, grasps the content as actual, and erupts on the scene of history, both personal and, potentially, capitalized.

Attention can only be exerted over contents being in our accessibility, i.e. belonging to our cultural density. An old man who has no notion of how a computer works has no access to the virtually infinite contents accessible through digital connection, no matter the relative availability of a computer in his office or in any physical environment he is immersed in. This is the nature of cultural density and attention can only operate on it, as far as language and culture are concerned. Attention operates also outside the sphere of cultural contents, since it is informed by senses and can be exerted over phenomena which exceed the sphere of language, but once we want to discuss the phenomenon of culture, we must revert to the fact that, in language, attention can only be *turned to* something that was there, in potency, in the range of the subject's cultural density.

We must therefore remember that accessibility to us, availability to attention, is not just existence in a space materially reachable by our sight: the Iliad is available to anyone with Internet connection, but it does not belong to the cultural

density of whoever has never heard of it. Attention, therefore, requires *hearing of*, or *having heard of*. *Hearing of*, before seeing, before watching. *Hearing of* does not equate hearing, not only for the obvious figurative value of the *hearing of* which is lacking in the simple hearing (we 'hear of' even when reading, while we only hear when, well, hearing), but also in the passivity involved in the former: 'I have heard of it' means I have not investigated it, I do not know, I have not yet devoted my attention to it. *Hearing of* is a self-expression in negativity, a form of the not-yet, and an insight into the nature of cultural density.

We do not 'hear of' a Voice: we *hear it*. The Voice of the Other is heard in the meeting: the Other - as firstly met - is always unheard of, and only seen (or heard?⁴) in the meeting, but hearing of the Other is not the same as hearing their voice. The voice from which I can hear of an-other is always that of a third, another-other so to speak, a voice that is not proper to the Other I am hearing of.

⁴ This discloses an interesting question: the gaze, crucial to modern phenomenological theories of the Other, especially in the Face of the Other as constructed by Levinas, summons me. But if I 'see' the Other as other, what about hearing? While I cannot have seen an-Other before seeing them, I could have heard *of* them before seeing them or meeting them. If the Other is always an absolute, what happens about the pre-encountered other? We are faced (!) with two possible solutions: either we reduce the Other to an un-meetable 'first Other', who has the face of the obstetric and means nothing to our not yet fully conscious self, or we break the illusion of this perfect Other as depicted by Levinas and realize that, since we are always already immersed in a world of communication, total Otherness can only be encountered when we *hear of* the unheard, and not when we lock gaze with another. We are left wondering, though, what, in the sphere of hearing, can substitute the simultaneity and the inevitability of this "locking" of the gaze(s).

Beckett's Godot is the antonomasia of a character that can only be heard of, one that lacks a voice. He is spoken of, and has been heard of before the plays begins, so that he is twice removed, since even the *hearing of* is hidden from the spectator. Vladimir and Estragon have already heard of Godot, and while it is not clear whether they *know* him or not, he is part of their discourse. Pozzo, on the other hand, has *not heard of* Godot, Godot is outside his reach until brought into it via the other two clochards. Indeed, the character of Pozzo is unwilling to engage in an interpretation of the unseen Godot, and the fictional illusion allows him to constantly recreate a status of not having heard of, of being oblivious to him, which would be impossible to an ordinary subject. The very name of Godot, of whom they have been speaking for entire scenes, is constantly vanishing from Pozzo's mind («If I had an appointment with this Godin... Goden...» - Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, act 1), dissolving itself back into his cultural density.

Even characters bursting into scene (and thus acquiring a voice, and a relevant one to boot) can be *heard of* before properly being met. A famous example, *Pride and Prejudice's* "object of desire", Mr. Darcy, is seen, but not yet met; he is spoken of, he is *pronounced to be*:

Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien, and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year. The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man. (P&P, Ch.3, Par. 5)

The voice that has spoken *of* Darcy is not his, yet he is unmistakably the centre of attention. Darcy can (and will) speak, but his importance is prefigured by the voices of others. The act of appearing is muted, relying on the voices of the bystanders to give account of the apparition.

A multitude can have a voice, while it is seldom heard of: the voice of the People is heard (and sometimes listened to) by the inspired politician, but becomes nothing more than *a* people, when it is *heard of*. When the multitude is heard of but not listened, it loses any identity, it is fragmented into incoherent individual forces, becomes a *mass* as Manzoni exemplifies:

What constitutes the mass, and the real material of a mob, is a mixed heap of men, who by undefined gradations, fall, more or less, into one of the extreme parties : some a little fanatic, some a little knavish, some inclined to have justice administered according to their own views; some looking anxiously to see some villainy committed, ready for any thing ferocious or merciful, to adore or to execrate, as occasions may present themselves, to experience fully the influence of either one or the other, feeling greedy every moment to know, and to believe any thing however extravagant, impatient to cry out, to applaud, or to condemn. (The Betrothed, Chapter XIII)

There is no *deus* in a *vox populi* where the *populus* is nothing more than an object of conversation. The divinity is in the voice, the Voice of God speaks to Moses

from the bushes and he hears it. The power of hearing the voice is lost in the re-narration, in the hearing of. 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed' (John 20.29), and *hearing of* is not-seeing, is relying on witnesses, although not eye witnesses but verbal ones (ear-witnesses?). Retelling cannot carry the Voice, and only speaking again (and hearing *prima facie*) can reinstate the divinity ('The word of the Lord', as the catholic liturgy reminds us at the end of every reading during mass).

None of these situations (the voices of the Other, of the People, of God) contemplates a value for the *heard of*, since hearing of implies not being involved in the subject matter, being (still) oblivious to what *is*. Something we have *heard of* is something to which we can turn our attention, specifically since we have not yet done as much, and this *turning* is what constitutes the moment of attention, which has always been surpassed when we are hearing / seeing / listening / reading something (as opposed to hearing of it). After the moment, the 'heard of' becomes the 'read' (or the 'heard', the 'listened to'), and thus it must be in this moment that the turning of attention is originated, resolved and forgotten.

After the moment of attention, the content is a content I know, a content I am reading, a content I interpret, and by interpreting I possess it in a way that it was not before, when all I had was the potentiality for contents which I could access. That potentiality is still there, luring me to expand my horizon, to reach once more in to it, to turn my attention to the next exciting potential content. But the actualised content is not there, anymore, the turning of attention is forgotten, since it does not

remain in the history of my knowledge. I have read, I have interpreted, I cannot recall the feeling of not having read, of not having known.

The negativity of not-knowing, of not-having-accessed-yet, is something that cannot be felt, the having heard of but not having read is not a feeling that can be recalled, since it is not something that was ever the subject of our attention. If it had been, the status of its object/content would not have been that of the 'having been heard of', but something that the subject had an interest in, to which the subject had already turned his/her attention. Before reading, before interpreting, there was nothing: the content existed only in the mass of accessible content. Indeed, our only way to refer to the un-accessed content, to the heard of, is in terms of what our access to it gave us.

'Before reading Melville, I did not know who Ahab was'⁵ is more a statement about one's status after interpretation than it is one about our before-attention condition. Ahab can exist to my consciousness only after being the subject of my attention and in the original time *before* my attention was turned to Ahab such a statement would have made no sense to me, or at least would have made no more sense than just saying that there are things that one does not know, which constitutes however a far more general, impersonal and far less situational statement.

⁵ This could be only partially true, because one could have accessed the content-Ahab without necessarily accessing the entirety of the content-Moby Dick and certainly without having accessed such a thing as [the entirety of the works by] Melville.

The very status of being 'heard of' is stripped away from the content when the sentence 'I heard of it' is uttered: attention has been turned to the content, a discussion is ensuing, the liminal condition of pre-presence has been dragged into the presence of discourse. As soon as we hear another talking of it and we comment 'I have heard of it', we are interpreting it, trying to discern *what* it is, *when* I heard of it, when and how it came to be part of my cultural density: the content has been already extracted from the *aurea mediocritas* of anonymity granted to it by the contemporaneity of cultural density and has been fixed into a precise instant in time. The time at which I was asked about it, the time I recall first hearing about it and the time (yet to come into actuality) of when I am going to 'read it', to 'interpret it'⁶, all of these are suddenly disclosed and brought into being, creating a history and a story of my relation to the content, the former already accumulating data (the when of these three instances), the latter shaping my memory of my relation to it.

History is not before attention, and Gadamer's idea of historical awareness as foundational to our approach to culture is flawed by his understanding of the possibility of reception of content as a given, without an analysis of why such contents can even be received. Temporal proximity means nothing in terms of potential accessibility to the content, and sharing an age or an epoch gives no guarantee about sharing cultural density. The time in which attention is exerted, the

⁶ This is, by the way, an illusion of discourse, since mentioning the content as something-I-do-not-know [yet] is, indeed, already an interpretation, a comparison of what I 'heard of' with what I know. The content is no more the 'not accessed' but is interpreted as something-I-do-not-know; the process of interpretation is very much alive already.

moment that disrupts one's cultural density to recreate a new array of potentially accessible contents is independent from the moment in which the content was first uttered. One's historical awareness can only come from one's access to the contents, and shape his/her systematization of them, but cannot be the origin of such access, since it is generated through the turning of attention to such contents.

When he speaks about *Les Problèmes Épistémologiques des Science Humaines*, Gadamer is convinced that historical sense constitutes the overcoming of the basic naïveté of seeing things 'just as they are', but it is unclear whether he considers this historical sense to be an a-priori faculty of consciousness (which would thus express itself autonomously as historical consciousness) or whether he believes that such an awareness stems from the contents accessed *as they are* but modified by entering in contact with consciousness itself. He states that interpretation is the reflexive behaviour through which historical consciousness receives (not passively) the voices of the past, and this once again begs the question of *how* consciousness has come to be aware of history. No matter the answer we choose to give to this question, it is necessary that the contents are accessed, before the voices they contain can be heard (and interpreted).

Gadamer, reading Heidegger⁷, understands historicity as the place for the tension between attention and oblivion, but does not show how the two are

⁷ Gadamer, "Martin Heidegger et la signification de son 'herméneutique de la facticité' pour le sciences humaines" in Gadamer, Hans Georg, *Le Problème de la Conscience Historique*, Paris: Seuil, 1996. p. 29.

supposed to be merged together. Memory is the opposite of oblivion, not attention, which is the condition for both: for something to be forgotten, it needs to have been noticed first. We do not abandon to oblivion what we have never known, and in order to turn *away* our attention, allowing for forgetfulness, we need to have first turned our attention *to* it. Can historicity be the line between remembering and forgetting? Maybe, but we must then distinguish historicity from the product of historical consciousness, if we want to preserve the latter as an act of interpretation: to interpretation, retaining partially is a performing act of creation, of projection, and what is not chosen (and thus consigned to oblivion) is not in tension with what is preserved.

Gadamer's notion of historicity relies upon Dilthey's idea that historical awareness and historical perspective are the source for any kind of knowledge and are primary to the subject. In Gadamer's reading, Dilthey main goal is to make historical consciousness not only the necessary instrument to reach any kind of historical knowledge, but indeed a mode of *self*-knowledge.⁸ Gadamer follows Dilthey, ignoring Husserl's intuition: by bracketing the historical situation as contingency, Husserl calls for something foundational going beyond historical experience. The Lebenswelt is not born out of our historical awareness, but comes before it, before any awareness of us in time. It is bizarre how Gadamer, who in the same period was using Heidegger to explore the value of projection for

⁸ Cf. Gadamer, "Scope and Limits of the work of Wilhelm Dilthey" in Gadamer, Hans Georg, *Le Problème de la Conscience Historique*, Paris: Seuil, 1996. p. 29.

hermeneutics, could deliberately ignore the breakthrough made by Husserl and his new insights into our way of interpreting the world. Even limiting one's reading to Heidegger (and especially to *Being and Time*, the explicit frame of reference for Gadamer's use of Heidegger), it is hard to understand how Gadamer could remain true to a philosophical standpoint that put historical awareness on such a high pedestal.

But even accepting Gadamer's and Dilthey's notion of historical perspective as necessary to avoid distortion when accessing the contents, we must reject the primacy accorded to historically informed interpretation, since this cannot be exerted on a content which has not been accessed yet. The awareness itself can only come after a reflection about time and cultural evolution (since it is a matter of understanding one's culture as a product of one's time) and this cannot happen *outside* history, and the testimonies of such a history need to be found, and accessed, in one's cultural density. The primacy of historical perspective as orienting our thought must make way for the moment of attention, which while being exerted over a cultural density shaped by historical perspective, shares with the latter a continuous dialectical dynamic, with the one setting the stage for the activity of the other, and vice versa, in an ever expanding movement of projection and actualization.

Historical awareness cannot provide us with anything that our cultural density has not already made available to us, since the idea that History determines the totality of cultural contents available to our consciousness does not take into

account the exploration of cultural density we have carried out in Chapter 1. Our chronological collocation is only partially responsible for the contents available to us, since as we have seen we do not have a potential access to all contents previous or contemporary to us nor do we share an identity of potential accessibility with everyone else living in the same historical milieu.

Dilthey describes the historical Self (i.e. a Self acting with historical consciousness) as operating a mediation between History and one's own historicity; this, however, is already a de-historicization, since this mediation can either be immersed in history or be an absolutely free choice. In the first case, such mediation is already irremediably flawed by its own necessity given the historical moment, and cannot be reduced to anything else than a self-less historical milieu, bringing us once again to the indisputable difference between contemporaries' access to contents, which was exactly the question we were trying to answer. In the second case, Self and Method (a crucial expression of Self in the approach to culture in the work of Dilthey) must express an absolute affirmation over the contingency of one's historical essence, thus denying the very process the mediation was trying to convey; we are taken back to the absolute instant of individual attention, as the only *discrimen* for our access to contents. Cultural density is then not reducible to a contingency, nor to a historically determined abstract methodological issue, but it is the very starting point and grounding for our intellectual and cultural expression, in need of a moment of attention, personal and absolutely instantaneous, to bring the contents from their state of potentiality to actualization in interpretation.

What we can salvage of this important reflection on the role of historical context and personal historicity is this: to be conscious of our nature as conditioned beings. But we must renounce the illusion that we can break through this via historical awareness. «The real life, which is immanent knowledge, assumes the traits of a universal experience»⁹ is to be intended with the 'real life' not being determined by the historical moment but by our personality and our personal cultural density, the summa of our available cultural contents (or inheritances, as they will need to be considered when we will tackle historical perspective in its more proper post-attention space).

Before historicity, then, comes attention, which is both a state and an activity of the subject. The subject is or is not *attentive* to something (or is attentive now and was not before), and/or the subject *exerts* its attention over something. The two are not identical, although they can coincide in certain situations. First of all, *attentive* as a state, as prolonged in time, belongs more to the process of interpretation than it does to the moment of attention as instantaneous, self-propagating and self-standing. The moment of attention can indeed give rise to a state of awareness and attention in the subject, but cannot have its origin in it, otherwise attention would already be directed to the object, and we should simply look elsewhere (earlier) for the moment itself. Analogously, a state of attention would presume an object of such attention, stabilising this attention as coming from the subject and being directed at

⁹ Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften* v. 5 p. 364, quoted by Gadamer in "Scope and Limits...", op. cit.

the content, and as we have seen the content itself, as pre-interpreted and immersed in the I-You/They of cultural density, is not susceptible of objectification (of an I-It relation).

If we dismiss *attentiveness* as the source of attention, we should explore the possibility of attention as grounded on an instantaneous act of the subject, wondering if attention is exerted by his conscious self, and whether it depends on other intellectual faculties or it is a self-standing primary faculty of the subject himself. First of all we shall inquire whether attention is willing, unwilling or whether it can be both. Contents are pre-presented to us, but attention is the force that actualizes them into the sphere of our consciousness.

We have discussed the dimension of the *heard of* and we have said that when we answer 'I heard of it' we are already engaging ourselves in interpretation: answering the voice of the other can bring a content to the forefront of our attention. In this case, without will, we are forced to discuss the content, even if it is to reject it ('I am not interested in it'): we should not confuse the moment of attention with the pursuit of an interest (which as we will see is an important matter to discuss when approaching the problem of inheritance). It would appear that our attention is summoned by the activity of an-other, and forced to turn to the object of our discourse.

However, listening involves turning our attention to the other, since hearing is not listening: listening involves understanding the language and engaging, once again, a discourse and an interpretation of such a discourse. The other speaks of

something, but our will to listen is what allows us to understand enough to permit our attention to be turned to the content. The first content, in this case, is the content of the voice of the other, which we choose freely to access. Only through this first moment of attention, the other is allowed to lead our attention to a second moment, the one in which we focus on the content to which our turning of attention was called.

Even when we encounter contents while accessing other contents and we can be (and usually are) caught in a series of moments of actualization of the contents in which our attention is turned from a content to another, as it is common when we are exploring or researching a certain subject matter, moving inside its boundaries but exploring different subsets of contents. If it is true that the original turning of attention must have been voluntary, the same must be said of all the moments of attention which follow one another: a content entering our cultural density is something over which we have little control (although our choices influence positively the augmentation of our cultural density), not so much the contents that we choose to access. Turning our attention is always a conscious act, although it is influenced by cultural density (in terms of possible objects) and arguably by subconscious considerations (but this would entail a psychological analysis more apt to a Freudian discussion than it is to this exploration).

Attention, thus, is a faculty that is only exerted in the moment and which discloses attentiveness, and interest. Language tricks us: there is no identity between the instantaneous attention and the prolonged attentiveness, and the latter

depends for its coming into being on the first one having been. We can *maintain* our extended attention (=attentiveness) only in virtue of having *exerted* our instantaneous attention, by turning it to the object.

Turning attention *from* an object *to* another, is always a momentous action, but it could lead us to assume that since we are moving it from the first to the second one it needed to be “still” on the second one. However, this is once again an illusion of language. If we understand attention as a faculty of noticing, of grasping something that was not there for us in a conscious way as an object to be engaged by our intellect, we cannot take such an attention to be constantly directed to the same object. Concentration is not attention, it is attentiveness, or interest. ‘May I have your attention’ is always a beginning, it is about what was not before, it is not an invocation to remain in the same status. Having somebody’s attention is a movement, it is a turning of their attention to me. After getting their attention, which amounts to an active choice, a content or a person can only maintain it, a passive continuation, an expression of attentiveness.

Persistence is an obstacle to attention and a stumbling stone even for attentiveness: what is always ‘there’ in the realm of our everyday experience is either not yet an object of attention or it risks being not an object of our interest and attentiveness anymore. Contemporary artists and conceptual art have introjected this sentiment and made it crucial to their very notion of artistic expression; Warhol commented on his *Death and Disasters* (a series of iterated paintings of horrible mechanical incidents and technology related fatalities): «But when you see a

gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn't really have any effect» (Warhol, in Swenson, *What is Pop Art*, 1963, 60). The "effect" is the effect on our sensibilities, on our conscience and feelings. However, the content of the picture (the fatality, the loss, the horror) would still effect our feelings, if accessed freely. Warhol is not claiming we are desensibilised in relation to the pain and suffering: what he is discussing is the very possibility, for us, of noticing such a content. The reason the effect on our feeling is negated is that the interposition of *banalisation*¹⁰ has made it impossible for us to turn our attention to the content.¹¹

This is not true only of cultural contents as constructed in texts and symbols, but even (and maybe in particular) of everyday objects (the 'ready-to-hand' tools crucial to Heidegger's theory of the World); Anish Kappo, London based Indian visual artist, describes his work on de-objectified forms saying that «[he is] interested in that moment when a thing dematerializes, when it isn't just an object» (quoted by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, in their exposition of his piece "*Untitled*,

¹⁰ Surprisingly enough (despite familiarity with *banal* and with the "-isation" suffix), English has not "imported" such a word from French. While *trivialisation* captures some aspects of it, the insistence of *banal* on the lack of originality makes it more suitable than the simple *trivial*.

¹¹ We should notice here how the container, as a piece of art and an object of reflection, is in turn a content accessed by our attention, both when we see *Death and Disasters* and when we discuss its sociological and artistic value. However, this does not eliminate the exemplary value of the reflection on the "sub-content" (the images of pain and death) which is subtracted from our attention by repetition. Perpetuation, with its constancy in time and space, reduces the space for the momentariness of the act of turning our attention to the content.

(*Shu-red*)", 2007): only by destroying familiarity and usualness the not-anymore-an-object can become once again an object-of-attention. The space for attention is disclosed – in this case and in many others - by the novelty of the focus of attention, which needs to be created through the disruption of its habitual reality. The 'dematerialisation' of the object destroys our interpretation of the object as a tool, subtracting it from the clutches of our interpretation and recreating it in a space of pre-presence (pre-presentation) which comes before interpretation.

What Kappo aims at conceptually – and what he is trying to obtain visually – is therefore the re-immersion¹² of the physical mass of his work of art in the pre-interpreted space of cultural density: we are left wondering whether this is possible if we are to encounter such a work in the scope and horizon of the prestigious museum and exposition hosting it. Our content is presented as already re-interpreted (or already re-materialised, to relate it to Kappo's words) as an object of art and it is doubtful whether it was ever present to our accessibility without the interpretational charge the situation (historical and spatial) enforces upon us.

Our external, momentous attention can be called, and demanded, by an Other, intended as a fellow subject, a Thou in an I-Thou relation. Our attention, however, is always turned to a content, to a single aspect of the Thou who is demanding a relation. When we access a text by an author, our attention is turned to

¹² Immersion in its transitive sense of us (or Kappo) immersing the content once more into cultural density, imbuing it with the non-conceptualized status of pre-interpretation; can this happen in virtue of our own (intransitive) immersion in the mind-experiment of the author?

the text as it is and appears, physically and intellectually, in front of us in the moment of attention. The author, the rest of their work, the other texts that share contents or contingent characteristics with the accessed contents: everything is pushed back by the absolute individuality of the moment of attention. Only a speculative moment, coming *after* attention and after the first interpretation, can grasp the general, attention is always focused on the particular at first. There is no such a thing as beginning to read “Cicero’s opera omnia” if not in retrospective: our attention is turned to one content; it is true, though, that turning our attention to a text can in turn extract other related contents from the anonymity of cultural density.

Going back to the figure of the Other, of the author of a text (or the actor giving a performance, or the voice on the phone, or even the person speaking to our face standing in front of us), this is not the immediate object of our attention, if we are to access the text (i.e. if our attention is turned to the text); not only reading/seeing/listening to the content does not imply paying any attention - on our part - to the carrier of the content, but indeed paying attention to the presenter interferes with our access to the presented [content]: if we are actively considering the beauty of an actor, we may lose sight of the content of his/her performance. Yeats, a poet always well aware of the symbolic value of words, describes the young woman involved in politics going to the rally and states:

Her nights [were spent] in argument

*Until her voice grew shrill.
What voice more sweet than hers
When, young and beautiful,
She rode to harriers?*

(Easter 1916 – 19-23¹³)

The arguments cannot be named, they are silenced, they disappear from the scene, despite the scene being one about them being spoken. The attention (of Yeats and of the reader) needs to be focused on the speaker (the sweet woman), and even more so when the nature of the spoken is not even mentioned, as in the verses of a friend and protégé of Yeats', the American poet Rupert Brooke, who describes his "goddess" in terms of voice, not of words:

*And voice more sweet than the fair plaint of viols is,
Or the soft moan of any grey-eyed lute-player.*

(Ante Aram, 18-19¹⁴)

Making her speak would lose her divinity and shift our attention to the content, without allowing the loving care of the poet to manifest her delicacy in

¹³ William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats Volume I: The Poems: Revised Second Edition*, Ed. by Richard Finneran, New York, NY: Scribner, 1997, p. 180. On Yeats's opinion of the contrast between the delicacy of his young women friends and their political activity (and Easter 1916 in particular) see Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, "Shrill voices, accursed opinions" in Yeats, W B, and James Pethica. *Yeats's Poetry, Drama, and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2000, 399-407.

¹⁴ Brooke, Rupert. *Collected Poems*. Cambridge: Oleander Press, 2010, p. 20.

front of our reading eyes. For the voice to speak, thus, it must stay silent, or un-listened to. Hearing the voice is not listening to it, and viceversa. Attention is a momentous instance independent from the way in which its object has been made present to it. In a space marked by absolute focus (as it is the case with the moment of attention) any distraction is incompatible with the main object; the first attention, the turning to, is the moment which precedes the possibility of attentiveness as extended in time and objects (and subject to reflection and theorization) and as such has no space for two objects, thus if the medium is to be made content this will happen only to the detriment of the content such a medium was supposed to carry.

There is a mutual exclusivity between the two, insofar as they are conceived as objects of potential attention. In the space of pre-interpretation, they are both suitable of becoming contents for our attention, but as soon as one of them is actualized the other is pushed back into a not-yet accessed status. We look at the stone with the engraved hieroglyphs in a different way if we are invested in Geology more than Egyptology, and the one mind-set cannot be confused with the other any more than the attention focused on the text can be assumed to be the same as the attention to the nature of the stone.

In such an hypothetical situation, even when looking at the text – which appears so unnaturally written, from our modern, Western perspective – we must choose whether to focus on the hieroglyphics as a visual unusual aesthetic or whether to read the text (assuming, of course, we are able to grasp the meaning). In this case, the text itself becomes an obstacle to attention, it goes from transparency

to opacity and presents itself as a first content, an object of attention, which needs to be addressed before moving to the content *beneath*, the content of the text (with the latter reduced to a tool and made transparent once again).

The author of a text is not immune to this absolute dichotomy: unless he becomes the content (in light of an attention focused on him and not on his work), he cannot be grasped at first, and must be “reconstructed” in interpretation (which to a certain degree always involves a reorganization of the content in light of other contents previously interpreted). It is hard to gauge whether such a primary attention can be focused on an Other who is not physically present: it would seem that, while we can decide to revel in the voice ‘more sweet than the fair plaint of viols’, and we certainly can appreciate the precious aspect of an engraved incunabulum, admiring the ‘voice of the author’ in the text is impossible without having first turned our attention to the content of the text itself. If this was true, that would mean that the distant, historicized author could never become a content for our absolute attention, but only be always a secondary object, to be understood but never witnessed. We shall come back to this in chapter 3, when dealing with the proper problem of inheriting a text (and an author) from the past, and be content (satisfied), for the present moment, with noting how much harder it is for the source of a content to become an object of our absolute attention than it is for the medium of such a content.

Taking into account the medium via which the content becomes an object of our attention leads us to inquire whether there is a difference between our asserting

our attention and experiencing the world via our senses. Is attention nothing more than putting all of our senses in play? Certainly, without senses we could not turn our attention to anything external to our consciousness, but this does not necessarily imply that any outward moment of attention is to be reduced to the physicality of senses.

Attention, as a *motus* of our consciousness, is influenced by the status of the world as presented to us via the senses (since we cannot turn our external attention to something that is not already there and perceived by us), and it is of consequence for the use of our senses (since when we turn our attention we also ‘turn our eyes’ or ‘lend an ear’). Nonetheless, the two spheres overlap but do not coincide. Senses are our way to access the object and to grasp its characteristics, while attention is the reason for our accessing the object itself, to focus our senses. Senses are active even when attention is distracted: we hear what we do not listen to, we see what we are not watching, and we perceive the background as colored even when we are focusing on the forefront.

If attention were to be contained by or synonymic with senses, distraction would be impossible or at least senseless. To be distracted, we need our attention to turn away from something, but that something to which it is (unwillingly) turned must be present to us and it can be as much only via our senses. Senses and attention struggle with each other, with attention trying to exert its dominance over them, and they - in turn - disturbing the concentration that lies at the essence of attention in the first place.

Attention itself is a limitation of senses, not a function of them, and stems from the self-consciousness of a being (our being as Dasein, as being immersed in a world) that knows that its senses present to it a world that is ungraspable at large by its intellect. The simultaneity of virtually infinite sensory stimulations transcends the possibility of understanding of a finite mind.

Aquinas explains (*Summa Theologica, Part I, Q86*) how, given the abstraction that intellect carries out on intelligible species, it is impossible for it to know singulars, without the intermission of senses. At the same time, however, the very notion of singularity shapes the way our intellect knows and provides a schema for our senses to be exerted: if it is true that our intellect could not grasp the singular object without senses, it is also true that our senses receive the world as a not-organized reality, and only our intellect can discern the singularities in between the absolute generality of our sensorial inlay. This is particularly true for cultural contents, for texts and artifacts that are meant to be subject to interpretation. Senses alone can only provide us with the factuality of their “being there” as objects, but it is the moment of attention that allows our intellect to take notice of them, providing interpretation and, even before that, the very understanding of them as objects for a possible interpretation.

Attention, when exercised outwardly (and not as an exercise of memory and imagination alone), is thus channeled by the senses, but it is not a function of them. Even when we assume that something is forcefully presented to our attention via the senses, it is only in virtue of our fully functional and self-preserving attention: if

we do not notice something extremely notable, we will describe ourselves as extremely distracted, with ‘our head in the clouds’¹⁵; whether we *choose* not to focus on the events (despite their notability) or whether the distraction is due to our attentiveness being devoted to something so interesting that our attention is not ready to be turned, the result is the same: no experiential presentation, no matter how intense, is guaranteed to grasp our attention.

Distraction is an affirmation of independence of attention from the senses, although it can be presented in discourse as a forceful redirection of our attention. When we are not listening to a source, and we are distracted, that is because our attention has been actively redirected, destroying the attentiveness that we had (or were supposed to have) granted to that source. The source is still there, emitting sounds that our senses can catch, and the ‘other’ object of our attention, by which we are distracted, is not necessarily affecting our senses with a more intense magnitude. Novelty, more than loudness, is the measure of distraction; the ‘intervening’ is the dimension of our losing attentiveness and turning our attention to something new.

¹⁵ Curiously, an idiomatic expression that appears verbatim in all main European languages, and that chooses to describe a situation of inward self-focus with a figurative “place” that is not only external to, but also very remote from the subject. It is the misunderstanding of attention, that is often presented as externally determined, and as subjugated to the senses: if the man is not focused on what we are presenting, his senses are clouded. We will see in a moment how this understanding of the relation between senses and attention is naïve and unsuitable to an analysis of our process of knowledge.

To clear any doubt about attention's independence from the senses, it is enough to consider the very fact of our internal attention. We can turn our attention to something that is not present to the senses, and is not present-ed by and through them. Fichte famously called the attention of his students to turn from an object of the senses (the wall) to their act of thinking the wall.¹⁶ Inward attention is then our initiating a thinking process whose content ideas are not 'immediate sensuous' ideas (to use Locke's distinction) but are provided by memory, speculation and imagination. Thought (or reflection) is thus sparkled in the moment of attention, without any necessary input from outside sources (and thus without the collaboration of our senses).

Attention, in this case, appears to be the first moment of thought. Is then attention a function of thinking, a sub-product of reflection, whereby it finds its own foundation? Have we rescued attention from the domineering grasp of the senses just to hand it over to the intimate supremacy of thought? Attention stems from self-consciousness, since only I can be turning my attention to an object that was not present-ed to me *before*. Without an idea of the self, of my self, my attention is not turned, or at least I cannot grasp the new object as an object of my attention, but simply as naively present in the world reachable by my senses.

¹⁶ 'Denken Sie die Wand', the opening invocation by Fichte to his students, and their stupefied reaction after the following steps of required self-reflection, are narrated by Henrik Steffens in his autobiography. The passage is referred in English in J. G. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797-1800)*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994, p. 111.

Moreover, I am always attentive to my interior self: nothing goes on in my mind which is unrelated and unknown to my self-consciousness. Even the Freudian notion of subconscious, so profoundly received by our Western culture and so strictly connected to our interaction with the world, is framed by this relation between attention and the self. We are not aware of the subconscious because we cannot turn our attention to its content, since we are not aware of it. Nonetheless, we are conscious of our thoughts and drives, which such a subconscious generates. The drives, the movements, the events of our interior self are not unknown to us, and the moment of attention, of internal attention in this case, is repeated even in the realm of subconsciously motivated thoughts.

Attention, nonetheless, is hard for us to fully grasp, to understand at the fullest. Whenever we are thinking attention, our attention is distracted by our thinking, so that we can only think and be aware of the moment of attention, and of our turning of attention to an object. Our attention is always focused on the next thing, but our thought can only reflect upon the last thing we focused our attention on, unless we assume that we can be caught in a state of absolute attention on attention, which would nonetheless immediately decay to attentiveness, since the moment of the turning would already be lost and substituted by a state. Such a state of attentiveness toward our attention would therefore be unable to deal with the momentous nature of the turning, and reduced to attentiveness toward attentiveness, which - while certainly worth of dedication - is not what we first hypothesized as the object of our reflection.

Schelling, with incomparable poetry, tells us that self consciousness is «the lamp of our system of knowledge, but casts its light only forward»¹⁷ and this suits perfectly the points we addressed about attention: it can never rest, it is either moving or not present, cannot shed light on itself, but only on its objects, and is not fully reachable by self-consciousness, on which nevertheless it depends for its conceptual elaboration. Just like Schelling's self-consciousness, attention can never illuminate itself, and yet we depend on it for illumination of the world. If consciousness is a lamp, a flashlight, attention is the wrist that moves it, allowing us to illuminate the new object. Once the movement is done (when attentiveness has begun) and the object is lit (by the senses), the wrist may rest, may even disappear from the picture, only to be needed again at the next moment of attention.

Attention is therefore not ancillary to consciousness but as necessary to it as it is dependent upon it. Consciousness is the basis for attention, but it would be

¹⁷ Schelling, *Principle of Transcendental Idealism*, Chapter 1 ("On the supreme mediating principle of knowledge"). It is interesting to note how, in this very same text, Schelling will come to equate philosophy and thought with the freedom of the philosophizing self, able to relate to whatever object it wishes and unconstrained by the objects it encounters. Self-consciousness is described as an *act* which cannot be reduced to being. While deeply grounded in Schelling's idealism, this schema is unparalleled in its wonderful depiction of consciousness in general (and not only of the Self) as something restless, which cannot be grasped in terms of its *being* something, but only as a momentary action. Despite subsequent philosophy (especially modern philosophy of mind, but also modern phenomenology since Heidegger – see Levinas) having done exactly what he advocated against (i.e. analyzing our consciousness as a state), his profound intuition remains valid when applied simply to attention, and not to consciousness in its whole.

limited to self-consciousness (deprived even of embodiment) if it weren't for attention. Merleau-Ponty's analysis of our perception of the 'natural world' addresses this relation of 'perceptual consciousness' to the world

Perception entails a process of making explicit which could be pursued to infinity and which, moreover, could not gain in one direction without losing in another and without being exposed to the risks of time. [...] The percept is and remains, despite all critical education, on the hither side of doubt and demonstration. The sun 'rises' for the scientist in the same way as it does for the uneducated person, and our scientific representations of the solar system remain matter of hearsay, like lunar landscapes, and we never believe in them in the sense in which we believe in the sunrise. [...] Each thing can, after the event, appear uncertain, but what is at least certain for us is that there are things, that is to say, a world.¹⁸

While Merleau-Ponty's words clearly revert to the discussion of the senses above, there are two instances of his prose underneath which lies our elusive matter, the nature of attention: the making explicit, as a process of disclosure, needs to be momentous, and this strikes us as being at odds with the 'always active' nature of senses and perceptual consciousness. This moment, repeatable ad infinitum, is imbued with what Merleau-Ponty defines as «the momentum which carries us beyond subjectivity, which gives us our place in the world prior to any science and

¹⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. Colin Smith, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 401. Additional page references are given in parentheses.

verification» (p. 400): we should by now recognise, behind this 'momentous moment', the function of attention as we have described it so far. Attention is what gives us the certainty of the event, which can 'appear uncertain' when attention is once again directed to another object, turned to the next event in our perception, with the first one receding, «disappearing only to give place to another perception» (p. 401). As we said already, attention is an instantaneous act of 'turning', which discloses the possibility of *a* perception in a world of perceptions at large. Perceptions operate in a state of attentiveness initiated by the moment of attention, which does not belong to perception and is conditioned by consciousness in a reciprocal relation.

What we have said about the difficulty of turning our attention to our very moment of attention can be said more specifically also of our accessing a cultural content. The act of reading, seeing or listening to a content, just like Fichte's thinking of the wall, is 'made explicit' in Merleau-Ponty's sense only retrospectively, and in a dimension of reflection which is detached from the act of reading, seeing or listening which happens in the world of perception. While the phenomenon of access to and appropriation of has always already happened, we can turn our attention to our memories and conceptions of it, recreating such an object for our attention not through a re-enacting of the act (which would be a different, performative act, and not the act of first access which constitutes the desired object) but in virtue of our reflection. This attention through memory is less immediate (since it temporalizes attention in a line of times that is necessarily post-interpretation) but nonetheless

exerted, in the way internal attention is exerted, as we mentioned before when discussing attention-to-self.

This temporalization is not true of the more immediate act of turning attention to an object, and a cultural one to boot. The object-content is present to us as pre-interpreted, being *there* without any consideration of space and time, or at least of space and time of its creation. We perceive that the content is 'there' (with the "there" being a function of availability, and not one of distance) to be accessed 'now'. This is not necessarily related to the 'when' of the content. The *when* to which attention can be turned is always the *now* of a container. The play is on stage in the 'now', and Hamlet or The Clouds are collapsed into contemporaneity, as long as they are represented in a now of accessibility.¹⁹ They are on stage now and I am turning my attention to them 'today' when I sit through the play. The book is in my library (or available through my computer) and present as accessible, and such accessibility

¹⁹ Theatrical performances, more than any other cultural content, are bearers of the 'now' of the calendar, since their availability 'now' does not even require real accessibility, but simply the notion that such availability is happening 'in this period' or 'soon'. The messianic value of a piece 'being scheduled', especially shines with the occasion of the première: the content is "to come", yet is not there yet, and can only be accessed as potentiality, nonetheless disclosing a space of interpretation which can be explored by the reading of the booklet or by the reading of the script – which amounts, nonetheless, to acceding *another* content which is not yet the foreshadowed one. No other content can equate this tension between the being scheduled and the happening, although highly-expected novels from famous authors or academic pieces on debated topics can achieve a similar level of interest before they are fully accessible. Nonetheless, they are going to be crystalized in accessibility, while the messianic *pièce* is to be offered to our attention only at the one time.

disregards any consideration of the chronology of its composition, disappearing into the 'now' of "I am now reading", which implies a moment of attention that has already happened.

The time of attention is informed by the now, just like cultural density was, with its necessary "contemporaneity". But there are multiple "nows" which are condensed in the moment of attention, to which cultural density, with its static dimension, was indifferent. Beside the "now" of my being in the world today and being capable of attention now, and the 'now' of the object which is "now" there (the book is now in my library, the movie is now on, etc.) to be accessed/subject to my attention, attention introduces a third now, the now of accessing which was absent from cultural density, necessarily stuck in its pre-accessed status. I am *now* turning my attention to this or that: the moment of attention – that we have been discussing - is a dynamic now of events, contemporary and yet extremely different from the two *nows* which attention as potential shares with cultural density.

The now of the contents of one's cultural density was a time of not-yet (not yet read, not yet accessed, not yet mine) grounded in present and projected in the future (an unreachable future of absolute actualization of *all the contents* which was unreachable precisely in virtue of the constant re-creation of one's cultural density). It was an unreflective now, since reflection is never before interpretation, and because as we have seen the contents were not understood chronologically (since historicization is a function of interpretation) but only in the now of their being available.

The now of one's own presence-in-the-world was, as well, a non-chronological now, function of my being there as a being disclosed only in the present: as Heidegger points out, temporality is disclosed in discourse (and thus after the pre-presence of cultural density, *after* the moment of attention): «Discourse *in itself* is temporal, since all talking about... , of... , or to... , is grounded in the ecstatical unity of temporality.» (Being and Time, 349/400).

Conversely, attention is not just about 'being present', its dynamism is a function of Heideggerian 'making present', it is the first instance of «letting things be» [ein "Sein" lassen] (Being and Time, 354/405) which is disclosed by our interpretation and involvement in the world. Using Heidegger's language, attention is the bringer of contents (and cultural contents in particular) from the inauthenticity of the They into the absolute authenticity of concern/care. While we have already shown how the notion of inauthenticity prevents us from identifying the They with our cultural density and vice versa, Heidegger more than anyone else in the 20th century gives an account of this 'making present' which is precious for our understanding of the temporal collocation of attention, despite the fact that attention (*Aufmerksamkeit*) is never mentioned in his *opus magnum*.²⁰

While attention introduces temporality and breaks the serenity of the uneventful 'now' of cultural density and the pre-interpretation state of pre-

²⁰ Cf. in particular Being and Time, II.4, Sec. 69 (b): *The Temporal Meaning of the Way in which Circumspective Concern becomes Modified into the Theoretical Discovery of the Present-at-hand Within the World.*

presence, it is not yet exerted over a temporality composed of past-present-and-future. Past is absent, since as we have seen the possible temporal dimension of the contents is collapsed into their presence into availability, with their historical presence and their persistence in time being pushed back into interpretation, which can only happen after and in virtue of the moment of attention. Our 'attention to the past' is actually not 'attention', but a reflection, a speculative moment, which needs to follow our 'turning our attention' to a content (a monument, a relic, a text, a narrative, etc.) of which such a past is the object. Similarly, the future is only present as pre-figured, and it's limited to the content's future-as-accessed and the subject's future-as-having-accessed (the content). The future of their 'being' is bracketed; only their potential relational future is addressed by attention, in the form of expectation. Merleau-Ponty:

The interpretation which I now give is bound up with my confidence in psychoanalysis. Tomorrow, with more experience and insight, I shall possibly understand it differently, and consequently **reconstruct** my past in a different way. In any case, I shall go on to interpret my present interpretations in their turn, revealing their latent content and, in order finally to assess their truth-value, I shall need to keep these discoveries in mind. ***My hold on the past and the future is precarious***, and my possession of my own time is always postponed until a stage when I may fully understand it, yet this stage can never be reached, since it would be one more moment, bounded by the horizon of its future, and requiring in its turn further development in order to be understood. (Phenomenology of Perception, p. 404)

While it focuses on the general sense of what Merleau-Ponty calls ‘the human world’²¹ (wherefrom the insistence on the impossibility of a ‘full’ interpretation, with the escaping moment), this passage deals (although extremely briefly) with some of the notions which we have made crucial to our analysis of attention: the reconstruction of the past as an interpretation through different moments of reflection; the notion that only the present is fully in the reach of my attention; finally, the fleeting nature of the moment of attention. What is left to be addressed, then, is the connection between attention and the future, and the appearance of the latter into the ‘now’ of the moment of attention.

Attention deals essentially with expectation. There is no expectation in cultural density, since expectation implies the understanding of actualisation, or – as Heidegger said – «to expect something possible is always to understand it and to ‘have’ it with regard to whether and when and how it will actually be present at hand» (Being and time, p. 262/306). The expectations I hold about contents about which I know something are only made explicit (and thus present) in the moment of attention, in which the content is individualised as the one being accessed and extracted from the anonymous indifference of cultural density, whose opacity prevents the contents from being already fully present.

²¹ Merleau-Ponty recognizes that «the cultural world is [then] ambiguous, but it is already present. I have before me a society to be known» (*Phenomenology of Perception*, op. cit., p. 405). Nonetheless, his focus appears to be the role of embodiment in relation to such a cultural world and not such a world *per se*.

When a content is accessed, two sets of expectations overlap: expectations about the content proving to be worth something and expectations about oneself as a reader/listener of the content, as improved or empowered by the act of accessing it.

a) Text-related expectations.

On a most immediate level, the content is accessed, the attention turned to it, only insofar as it is recognised as a valuable content. This worth, this 'cultural' worth is in turn twofold:

1. We not only perceive it (as a conglomerate of sensory perceptions, as an object with dimension, colour, weight, size) nor we just consider it on the background of the social world we are immersed in (taking into consideration things like state of preservation, aesthetic, etc.). We do more. We access the content *as* a content. We read it, instead of letting the lines and the letters recede to simple aesthetic concerns. We listen to it, evaluating the meaning and not just the sound of what we hear. Such a value is the immediate value of the text *qua* text, but it is informed by a symbolic value that we have learned (which is language in both cases *and* writing in the reading situation). The expectation, in this case, is 'simply' that of a *speaking* content. A content which can be engaged culturally indeed, with a message or meaning (no matter how banal, naïve or inconsequential it may prove to be).

2. We also choose to access fully the text, reading it instead of skimming it, listening to it thoroughly instead of half-heartedly, finishing it instead of 'putting it down' midway, watching it instead of exiting the theatre or switching tv channel. This means that, past the moment of recognition of the content as a cultural content, of the con-textualisation of the text, we operate a choice, preferring the content we are accessing to other (potential and actual) objects of our attention. A judgment of value is always happening, but it is hard to find a general rationale behind such an act of judgment intrinsic in the moment of attention. The reason for our considering that content valuable can range from being confrontational and outraged, to being looking for amusement, to the search for inspiration, to the simple desire to be "up to speed" with the world at large, etc. Therefore, the judgment (which is by its very nature ill-informed whenever it ventures behind tautology) can only be reduced to 'my interest lies with this'. But since for the object of attention to be a text we must have an interest in such a text, this is reduced to an even more pleonastic 'my interest lies with what I am interested in'.²²

²² The untranslated (and untranslatable) text, the foreign speech, assumes here an extremely problematic value, especially when dealing with expectation-2: while the expectation-1 about the content per se is immediately met (the text is a text, and it is

b) Self-related expectations

Conversely to the expectations related to the content itself and to its value as a text and as a text of interest, amongst the motives informing our approach to the content there is always a component of expectation about our-Self(/ves). In approaching the text, we foresee ourselves as improved. Our self-projection in the future as the-one-who-has-read discloses an expectation that the text will prove useful. However, such an expected usefulness does not lie and is not restricted to the content per se. The same content, we are aware, could prove instrumental to Self-improvement for one and remain barren for another. The projection we are experiencing, when turning our attention in trepidation to the new text which is presented as to-be-read, as present-at-hand, is a projection which is absolutely personal, relies on our imagination to fill in the gaps of how it will modify our being.

All of these expectations rely heavily on the moment of attention, which while independent from senses and in a relation of co-dependence with self-

recognized as such as soon as attention is turned to it), expectation-2 (the text being of worth to me) collapses as soon as I cannot deal with the text as such. The text is pushed back to an aesthetic composition of lines, and yet it claims to be dealt with as a cultural content. The expectation-2 value is at the same time canceled (the text is *not* going to be useful) and multiplied (since expectation-2 cannot be verified, its potentiality is infinite; the unread text might have all the value I could ever need, yet it is denied of me). Both drives (cancellation and multiplication) can be reconciled with a conceptual shift to a level of self-related expectation, which will now be addressed: the expectation-2 is still true (since the text *is* potentially useful), yet its immediate form is useless *to me*, insofar as I cannot access it.

consciousness, must carry the weight of this projection and this judgment of value in order to disclose the space of interpretation in which worthiness (both personal and of the text) can fully be evaluated.

Chapter 3: Processing Inheritance.

In previous chapters, we have explored the pre-interpretational space in which the contents lie before being accessed and inherited, focusing on the absolute neutrality of their content to us. Then, we have analysed the moment of attention, as the crucial turning point transforming potential contents into actual text and ideas susceptible to be inherited. Nonetheless, we have not yet delved into the core of our exploration, i.e. Inheritance (and inheritances), a concept of which we have discovered some layers, but that, on the other hand, we have not yet illuminated by focused reflection.

First of all, we need to try to define what we mean by the word Inheritance. It should be clear, by now, that we are not referring to the physical, material and monetary inheritance provided in the last will and testament of a dying man. That is, indeed, a very important matter for our experience of society, but one that is best analyzed by legal historians and attorneys, or by economists if intended as a large, social phenomenon. Our focus, it should be made clear, is on the specular concept of cultural inheritance, and it is in this context that we shall make our analysis.

We have already mentioned the apparent synonymy between Legacy and Inheritance, but we must repeat here that in their proper usage one mirrors the other, without identity between the two. I have no intention of making a case for their proper usage, since no concern of language is present in my exploration.

Nonetheless, the way the terms are used here is best clarified if we consider their original sense, that being

- a) Inheritance = a 'thing' that we come in possession of, which belonged to someone else OR the act of inheriting such a thing.
- b) Legacy = a thing handed down by a predecessor. The standard definition of Legacy does not include the *act*, but we will address this in our next chapter.

Therefore, inheritance has to be considered in terms of reception, and not of passing on and handing down (beside, obviously, the notion of passing and handing down as needing a receiver, which we will address later). This limits but yet does not fully clarify what is meant by inheritance when we deal with notions of cultural transmission. Inheritance is used (and has been used in the context of this dissertation) to indicate no less than four concepts, all interconnected but not completely superimposable. One axis of distinction is between the individuality and the collectivity that can be implied in the term, while the other is the process/object distinction already present in the dictionary definition.

An inheritance is a content which has become an interpreted text, going through my process of reading and interpreting it, but that has, as well, become inserted in a vertical axis of time, being received *now* (or *later than then*) and having appeared *then*. Interpretation alone is necessary but not sufficient for a text to become an inheritance, a conception of time and a collocation of that content in time and relatively to subjective time are also needed. The main interpreter of the text, the inheritor who is making the text into an inheritance by making it part of his or

her system, is not necessarily the only one to be responsible for the recognition of the content as an inheritance and consequently for the chronologisation of the axis of transmission. His or her role, as inheritor, is crucial to the reception of the text, but not to its recognition as an inheritance.

Nonetheless, the inheritor is a crucial element of the *process of inheritance*. Inheritance as a process is the very act of reading a text that was written before. It could be unconscious (in which case an external validation in the form of recognition would become necessary), but for the moment it suffices to clarify that the notion of inheritance comprises both the content and the process by which such content is appropriated. It is a process that happens in a time that is the time of reading/hearing (=accessing) the content but that at the same time relies on a time that is antecedent to that moment, the time in which the content is originated, i.e. the moment of its creation. Moreover, it is a process that has both an instantaneous and an extended dimension, since the appropriation of a content (extended process) goes beyond the first access to it (instantaneous and finite).

Stepping away from the *littera* of the dictionary, *my Inheritance* (capitalized and with the possessive adjective) is, once again, an expression that brings us deeper into the core of the phenomenon we are trying to describe, while insisting on the dichotomy content/process we have found on the first level of meaning. *My Inheritance* is (with a parallelism to what happens with concrete properties) not only the single item that I inherit from one source, but the ensemble of all the 'things' that I have inherited from different sources and that now constitute an

integral part of my position in the world. In other words, *my Inheritance* is the system of ideas and concepts that I have *so far* received in my interaction with authors who came before my time, and thus the system of all my inheritances.

Analogously to what happens with the more stringent meaning, then, *my Inheritance* must also refer to a process, in this case the process of appropriation of all these contents (inheritances), which become part of my Inheritance. The *so far* is the time in which my Inheritance as a process is experienced: not in a sense of irrelevance (since my Inheritance is constantly complete insofar as it represents everything I have deemed important to my system of thought), but as a dimension of presence in the present which a single instance of inheritance could not grasp and that implies a constant modification while the present becomes past and new contents are added to what thought itself to be self-sufficient until such addition took place.

Time, then, is crucial to our experience of inheritance. Inheritance, by its very nature, can only happen in the *now* as opposed to the *then*, the past. Not a general, unidentified past, but the past to which the content belonged before being inherited. It was part of the inheritor's cultural density, but as we have seen such a space is characterized by a non-historical contemporaneity, which is different from the *now* of the inheritor in which the inheritance must take place.

This present is grounded in a historical awareness, such that the time inheritance is not the 'now' of the mere fact: as Bloch explains¹ the observation which characterizes our historical approach is not the mere contemplation of what he calls *factus brutus*, but finds its sense in our considering such a fact against the horizon of time as perceived by our subjectivity. In other words, the historical fact needs to be understood and thematized in light of the time in which it happened. In the case of inheritance, this is the time of the process-inheritance, i.e. the time in which our experience as receiving subjects is unravelled.

According to Ricoeur, such a thematization cannot be completely objective, since the thinker (be he an historian or a philosopher) cannot avoid bringing his subjectivity into the process². He distinguishes four traits of our subjectivity that can shape or interfere with our reception of the content from the past.

The first trait is 'historical choice' or the judgment of importance, which is absolutely fundamental for the process of inheritance: if something is read, but judged unimportant, the process is interrupted. The content would not be received, nor become a part of our philosophical system. This is highly problematic, since

¹ Bloch, Marc L. B, and Etienne Bloch. *Apologie Pour L'histoire, Ou, Métier D'historien*. Paris: A. Colin, 1997, esp. Ch. 4 "L'analyse historique", section 1 "Juger et comprendre." On the matter see also Ricoeur, Paul, *Histoire et Vérité*, Paris: ed. De Seuil, 1955, Chapter "Objectivité et Subjectivité".

² Ricoeur is here (*Histoire et Vérité*, ch. 2) referring to history, but given his understanding of history as «the reception [by the historian] of a series of facts and documents», his scheme works just as well for our case.

Theory cannot help the philosopher trying to expand his system as it can the historian looking for proof supporting his approach. Raymond Aron rightly states that «la théorie précède l'histoire»³, but the very nature of inheritance as a transformative process makes things more complicated: if it is true that we have a “theory”, a standpoint, when beginning the process of inheritance and interpretation of a text, we do so understanding that such a process could modify the standpoint itself.

Fichte explains that the only true philosophy is the one that transforms the thinking of its performers;⁴ similarly, no inheritance can be true if the end result is not a transformation (either by modification or by addition) of the system of philosophy of the thinker undergoing the inheritance. If there is no result, if the text remains dead letter, no inheritance can take place (and arguably no legacy, but this will be addressed later). We can understand Ricoeur’s remark as having two possible meanings:

- a) In a pre-interpretational space, turning our attention to one work instead of another. As I discussed in chapter two, this is a partially wilful

³ Raymond Aron. *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire. Essai sur les limites de l'objectivité historique*, Gallimard, 1991, p. 111.

⁴ «No one can arrive at this unknown unless it produces itself in him, but it does this only under the condition that *this very person* produces something, namely the conditions for insight’s self-production.» Fichte, Johan Gottlieb, *The Science of Knowing. J.G. Fichte’s 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*, translated and with an introduction by Walter E. Wright, New York: SUNY, 2005, p. 22.

operation, influenced by a chain of moments of attention, which becomes completely wilful when we enter a state of attentiveness. But, most likely, we should interpret Ricoeur's first step as

b) *Post-interpretation* of the text, or at least after the first access to the text.

Therefore, the choice must be understood as concerning the *use* of the content for historiographical purposes or, in the case of our analysis, an evaluation of worthiness from our part regarding the content; from this, a change of status would ensue for the content, which will evolve from a read and interpreted content into an inheritance. It is in the nature of appropriation, as much as it is in that of 'historical explanation'⁵, to require a moment of subjective judgment of importance, which is nothing less than this first step of the acknowledgment of subjectivity on Ricoeur's part.

The second step involves a 'vulgar conception of causality'. While this apparently does not apply directly to the process of inheritance as it does to theories of history, we just need to go back to the notion of relation in the Lockean sense, that we provided as a basis for our notion of content. We can then understand how, in the expansion of a complex idea (a content) into a larger one (a system of complex ideas, in this case our philosophical system), our understanding of relation is crucial. Therefore, we simply need to see causality as *the* form of relation that is subjectively understood when we approach facts and documents as historians, and

⁵ Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1955, p. 32.

understand that in *any* appropriation (thus including inheritance) a subjective view of relation is involved. After all, the process of historicisation as described by Ricoeur is similar to and may involve a process of inheritance, despite his interest in describing it matter-of-fact-wise and not trying to expand it to the reception of any content.⁶

In light of this simplification (from the relation of causality for reception of historical documents to relation *in general* as a tool for our reception of a content), traits 1 and 2 of Ricoeur's treatment of subjectivity can be compressed into the notion of judgment of importance and relation; after all, the two 'traits' deal with our interpretation of the content *prima facie*: beside dealing with the merit of the content, we must decide whether it relates, overall and in a meaningful way, to the array of (other) contents that constitute our system. This bring us back to expectation (expectation-A-(2)) that we already discussed⁷, with the qualifying difference that, if before it was a matter of *interest*, now we are dealing with *relevance*. The definition and verification of the former becomes explicit in the latter.

⁶ As we will see, this is not true of *Oneself as Another* and *Time and Narrative*, which are more concerned with the personal perspective of the historian/author than they are with History as a collective opus to which every historian brings its own subjectivity.

⁷ See Chapter 2, pg. 111. Briefly, Expectation A was an expectation about the text itself, with (1) being the expectation of the text having a meaning and (2) of it having a meaning *interesting* to me.

The third trait deals with «equivocal nomenclature»⁸ and it is not paralleled in our analysis. There is a difference, indeed, in the way the inheritor and the historian approach the past, since their aim is different. The product of the process of inheritance, per se, needs only to be understood by the inheritor, not in terms of correct interpretation, but of fruitful transformation. Therefore, the equivocal nomenclature does not constitute a problem, as it might be the case with the historian misrepresenting a concept in the historical document in light of something alive in his time (in Ricoeur's example, the problematic notion of State, which tends to be understood in terms connected to the meaning of the word at the time of the reader).

But it is on the 4th trait of the interpreter's "subjectivity" that the historian's perspective and the inheritor's one diverge the most: according to Ricoeur, the subjective part of 'historical reconstruction' implies trying to see the men behind the facts, to «deduct Men from events»⁹: while this is a limiting trait of subjectivity threatening the objectivity of History, it is a veritable aim of the inheritor. To fully grasp the inheritance as someone's legacy, we will *need* to deduct the author behind the text. However, this deals more with the relation between legacy and inheritance than it does with inheritance considered on its own, thus we will come back to this at a later time.

⁸ Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, p. 35

⁹ Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, p. 36

The time in which the interpreter exerts his subjectivity (from which the historian must guard himself, but which is not an issue for the inheritor) is nothing else than the extended *now* in which the content is accessed. There are three factors that help us identify this now.

- a) It is a *now*, a moment or period of time identified by the status of the reader and not simply by the progression of the reading. While we may not know the *time of the clock* at which we have accessed a content, we have a clear idea of when (in terms of years, activities, possible distractions) it became relevant to us. The process of inheritance is part of our self-evolution, our growth. Ricoeur says that «l'histoire fait l'historien autant que l'historien fait l'histoire»¹⁰, and this is true of inheritance as well. Therefore, speaking of the subjectivity of the reader at the moment of inheritance is the same as speaking of the inheritance itself, since it is a process determined by and determining such subjectivity.
- b) It is a *now* which is *conceived* and not *recorded*. Its identification (no matter how extended it is in time) can only rely on the awareness of the inheritor. Only the perceived beginning and end of the process can delimit the moment (or the time) of the inheriting. When discussing attention, we saw how the time 'at which I started reading Melville' is impossible to grasp when it is present, since at that time its relevance is

¹⁰ Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, p. 39.

lost on me. Only ex-post, looking back, I can identify that moment as the beginning of something persistent, which I later deemed worthy of significance, thus retroactively making it the beginning of an inheritance. Before such an awareness kicks in, the moment can only be recorded as 'the time when I grasped the book' or 'the time when I turned my attention to the page.

c) It is a *now* that is understandable on three different levels: three facets of this 'now' of inheritance (or this 'then' when thematised from the standpoint of my Inheritance in its whole) are collapsed into the moment of reading and interpretation.

i) There is a time of the reading that happens on the horizon of time as external to us. As we said, we cannot record the moment of our reading, but we can position it relatively to other factual events. 'When 9/11 happened, I had not read the Koran, yet' is both a statement about my internal state (I did not know Islam if not through the media) and a statement of factual time, and even 'I read Virgil before reading Dante', while not anchored to any *factual* time is still suitable to be aligned on a time line that is parallel to that of external time.

ii) The time of reading is also connected to "perceived" time, or interior time. This is true regarding the qualification of the time as connected to the reader's statuses, both emotional ('I discovered

Proust in a difficult time of my life') and related to Inheritance in its whole ('Plato was the first philosopher I read'). Memory shapes this perception of time ('Plato is the first philosopher I remember reading'), not only superficially (as if I *wrongly* recalled the time of the reading) but also substantially: what I remember as the time of the appropriation *is* the time of inheritance, since that is the point of the personal, internal timeline in which the event-inheritance is implanted. It is a time that changes its determination even *after* it is passed, since the qualifying qualities of that time (the remembered position and its relevance) change in light of the effects of memory.

- iii) The reader and the act of reading, and the inheritance process as well, are situated in a historical epoch or age. This is a conceived time (b), both on an individual and collective level: the individual recognizes certain features of 'his own time', but most importantly identifies his time as such. The process of inheritance takes place at a precise moment of his individual time (a), but nonetheless is contained by an epoch of time, which transcends his personal status. The very notion of epoch, though, is not a measurable one, since it relies on arbitrary limits that are shared (or contested) by participants in the historiographical discourse

and on a general consensus that is participated unconsciously by the larger part of the population.

As we mentioned in chapter 1, the idea of epoch or ages of History was an extremely popular notion with theorists of hermeneutics in the first half of 19th century; they were concerned with finding a working model to account for what was perceived to be cultural evolution and at the same time to discuss how individuals (both ordinary and extraordinary) could fit in such a model. We have discussed Dilthey and his idea of a cultural milieu as historically collocated, which served as a starting point for the definition of cultural density. He was convinced that to understand an author we must understand his time¹¹, a notion he claimed to have been first formulated by Semler¹². Given his focus on interpretation and understanding, Dilthey analysed the *situation* of the interpreter in time as a matter of fact, without inquiring what being in the same (or in a different) time actually meant. There are some references to «the whole» of one author's time, that needs to be «grasped from the individual's words¹³, but it is the Sense of Life of the exegete that remains central and the Other's *cultural milieu* remains in the background, as

¹¹ Wilhelm Dilthey. *On Understanding and Hermeneutics*, collected in Dilthey, Wilhelm, Rudolf A. Makkreel, and Frithjof Rodi. *Selected Works. Vol. IV*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1985.

¹² Johann Salomo Semler, a church historian and biblical commentator. Dilthey refers mainly to his autobiography *Semler's Lebensbeschreibung, von ihm selbst abgefasst*, which is currently not available in a modern edition.

¹³ Dilthey, *The Rise of Hermeneutics*, in *Selected Works IV*, p. 353.

an object onto which one should project his own individuality. The Sense of Life, as well, is not fully explained, and oscillates between a function of consciousness and an impetus to explanation influenced by external condition (i.e. the exegete's own cultural milieu).

At the beginning of the 19th century, Herder was a strong opponent of the idea (that he attributes to Enlightenment philosophers) that the epistemological condition of mankind could have stayed the same over history, and advocated a theory of interpretation that could account for the differences between the interpreter and the interpreted.¹⁴ However, far from claiming that the interpreter should embrace his belonging to an epoch and act accordingly, he warned the exegete of a text from succumbing to what he saw as 'the crowd': he believed that, given the ill-conception of philosophy amongst the people at any given time, the true thinker should have approached philosophy from a personal perspective, straying away from the *barbarism* of public opinion. He wrote that «there are disadvantages when the crowd thinks for us»¹⁵ and encouraged the philosopher to think alone, freeing itself from the burden of contemporary opinion. Herder has an interesting view of "ages" as interloping in a dynamic way. He writes that «every human being, in every age, thus stands in a middle, so to speak. He can gather about him the

¹⁴ Michael Forster, "Introduction", in Herder, Johann G, and Michael N. Forster. *Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

¹⁵ Herder, "How Philosophy Can Become More Universal and Useful for the Benefit of the People (1765)" in Herder, Johann G, and Michael N. Forster. *Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 26.

extinguished images of his ancestors, he can call forth their shades and, so to speak, make a feast for his eyes [...] But can he also cast a prophetic look into the later times beyond this grave?¹⁶».

It is interesting to notice how Herder's intuitions about the connection to predecessors and successors are reduced to theoretical tools by the lack of an alternative to the rhetoric of Culture: the individual has no access to all the "images" of the past, but only to some of them. While we could rework this notion from the concept of cultural density, Herder lacks such a tool, and it is precisely because of this that he struggles to give a coherent and consistent account of the individual's experience of 'gathering the past'. He tries to get to something similar when he discusses the role of Bildung in the education of the philosopher, but he then reverts to philosophical sense as present in the population at large. In his late works, he has resorted to a view in which every man can be a placeholder for humanity at large. The idea that «everyman is ultimately a world»¹⁷ implies that every thinker is part of a narrative of Mankind ultimately accessible to all individuals at all times. He arrives to such a view in order to support his ideas about the unity of the human race and his teleological view of it¹⁸, but by doing so he renounces the notion of the

¹⁶ Herder, "On the change of Taste", in Herder and Forster. *Philosophical Writings*. Op. cit, p. 254.

¹⁷ Herder, Johan G. *Reflection on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, abridged by Frank E. Manuel, University of Chicago Press, 1968, p. 4

¹⁸ By seeing humanity as sharing an uninterrupted stream of culture and ideas, he can reject the idea that 'races' exists amongst men (cf. "Same Species of Man throughout the whole

limitation of the hermeneutical approach that had been central to his previous works.

Herder fails to distinguish functionally between *Bildung* as *personal, actualised Culture* of a philosopher/historian and the sum of *all possible images of history* as shared by humanity at large: he appears to believe that the former is functionally capable of providing the individual with full access to the latter. The only concession he makes to the problem of accessibility is in relation to language, but he presents that as an interpretation issue and seems factually oblivious to the non-coincidence between one individual historian's access to the past and the 'world of the past' intended as a whole.

It is in a minor work of his - *On Thomas Abbt's Writings (1768)* - that Herder deals specifically with the need for the interpreter to take into account the difference of age between himself and the author of the interpreted text. Nonetheless, he focuses always on the age of the *inheritee*¹⁹, like when he states how «the explainer should define the borders» of the author's past world, own time and

Earth", Book VII, Ch. 1 of *Reflection on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*). By claiming that every individual has access to all of it, he can advocate for the role of Reason (unfettered by limitation in knowledge) as the source for State.

¹⁹ *Inheritee* is the one whose work/text/content is to be inherited. The need for the neologism was mentioned in the introduction, but the reader must be sure to comprehend what I mean by this here (and later): the inheritee is here the 'original author' of the content that is to be inherited. We will address the problem of terminology again at the beginning of Chapter 4.

‘world of posterity’.²⁰ Even if he is aware that our Bildung (education, or the process of cultural formation) will be determinant in our approach to the world («Prejudices of the formative years [...] are the pillars upon which we build our world-view»), he never considers how the age in which we live (the *cultural milieu* that Dilthey will explore) influences our Bildung: he appears to be convinced that *the right* Bildung is possible no matter the historical moment.

Herder never mentions any influence of the current Age on the interpreter once such a formative process is completed. Relatively to the work of ‘the author’ (the inheritee) Herder acknowledges a co-presence of his (the author’s) own ideas, elements of the world of the past, elements of projection into «the world of posterity»²¹, but also of an influence from «his own time»²². All of this disappears when he discusses the inheritor’s perspective: only methodological and critical concerns are voiced, as if the interpreter was living in a vacuum, or as if his proper cultural formation could put him in a sort of resonating harmony with the overall History of Mankind and screen him from the influence of the age in which he is immersed. But why, then, are we warned over and over²³ against Common Sense? Herder does not appear to be aware of this tension in his work, as if the

²⁰ Herder, “On Thomas Abbt’s Writings”, in Herder and Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 177

²¹ Herder, “On Thomas Abbt’s Writings”, p. 172

²² Herder, “On Thomas Abbt’s Writings”, p. 178

²³ See in particular *On the Change of Taste* and the already discussed *How Philosophy can become More Universal and Useful for the Benefit of the People*, both in Herder and Foster, *op. cit.*

compartmentalization of his approach (one work being devoted to Taste, another one to the proper way to interpret, another one to Bildung, etc.) meant he did not need to provide a coherent unifying theory. Once again, the attention to individual interpretation is exerted in a larger frame of cultural inheritance that is connected to tradition and gives no account of the individual's relation to the historically transmitted content.

The Romantic author who comes closer to address this distinction between the individual's situation in his age in time and the characteristics of this age per se is Fichte, in his work dedicated to philosophy of history titled *The Characteristics of Present Age*. When approaching this work (as most others by Fichte) we must be aware that it is meant not as an aggregated commentary (which could instead be argued for Herder's reflection on the matter, spread over different books), but as an 'organic' performative task of learning²⁴. Nonetheless, certain notions are clearly stated, and appear repeatedly throughout the book, giving us a certain grasp of what Fichte meant when discussing them. Moreover, even what can be taken away from these descriptions can provide a workable tool for our enquiry, independently from

²⁴ The theme of his philosophy as "live" thought, for which understanding it and performing it are the same, is ever-present in Fichte's work, and present in detail in most versions of his *Wissenschaftslehre*. In particular, in the opening paragraph of *Characteristics*, he tells his reader that [he his] «compelled gradually, and [on his] own sight, to build up this single thought out of its several parts, disengaging it at the same time from various modifying elements: this is the necessary condition of every communication of thought.» - Fichte, Johann G, and William Smith. *The Characteristics of the Present Age*. London: John Chapman, 1847, Lecture 1.

their being instrumental to Fichte's project at large. The interesting points in Fichte's account are those dealing with Humanity's time as divided in Ages/EPOCHS and most importantly with the relation between these Ages/EPOCHS of cultural time and time chronologically intended, and the role of the individual in respect to both of them throughout his life.

According to Fichte, at any given time Humanity inhabits an Age (or at least a fraction of Humanity inhabits a determinate Age, since he is aware of different conditions of different populations on earth). This Age he defines as being the relation of an Epoch (an Idea realized in time) to others and to 'Universal time':

Every particular Epoch of Time, as we have already hinted above, is the fundamental Idea of a particular Age. These Epochs and fundamental Ideas of particular Ages, however, can only be thoroughly understood by and through each other.²⁵

Fichte stresses that these Epochs and Ages are connected to the Idea of time that Mankind shares, and have no direct relation to what he calls the Life of the Individual (as opposed to the Life of the Race). His description in detail of what the main Epochs are (which inform what an Age can be) is not relevant to our exploration, but what I want to highlight is what Fichte says about the role of the individual in such a scheme:

²⁵ Fichte, *The Characteristics of the Present Age*. Lecture 1.

The Present Age considered *as a whole*, I mean; - for since, as I have remarked above, different Ages may, in perfect accordance with their spiritual principle, coexist in one and the same chronological Time, and even cross or run parallel to each other in different individuals [...] One may be behind his Age, because in the course of his **culture** he has not come into contact with a sufficiently extensive mass of his fellowmen, but has been trained in some narrow circle which is only a remnant of a former Time. Another may be in advance of his Age, and bear in his breast the germs of a future Time, while that which has become old to him still rules around him in true, actual, present and efficient power.²⁶

What Smith translates with Culture, here, is nothing different from what we were referring to when discussing Herder's Bildung. What Fichte is telling us is that our Education, more than the chronological accident of our birth, is the main factor in determining our relative position in the history of Mankind. I would like to argue, once again, that this idea of Culture and/or Education is not the most apt to the analysis, and should once again be replaced with the notion of cultural density. Fichte is once again talking about a process (since any transmission of thought is performative, as we said), which cannot be reduced to what we address with "Education", which is not a *status*. If we are to be "in advance" or "behind" our age, this can be only in virtue of something that is a concern of the *now* of our approach to cultural contents.

²⁶ Fichte, *The Characteristics of the Present Age*. Lecture 1.

This is on the one side cultural density (as the potential access to past ages and to Herder's "images of the world of the past") and on the other our Inheritance (as what we have received and made part of our system of thought so far). The two are collapsed into this notion of Culture, which indeed includes the notion of reduced or screened accessibility (insofar as someone could "ha[ve] been trained in some narrow circle"). Identifying all of this with "training" is reductive to say the least, and it is at odds with Fichte's further description of the role of individuals in Ages.

We must be aware that Fichte is not writing a piece on historiography nor developing a theory of interpretation (as it was the case with Dilthey and Herder): what we are considering here (the role of the individual thinker in light of the Age he lives in) is marginalia on the side of his theory of Reason as Life, which permeates the entire work. It is not surprising, thus, that the connection between training/education/access to contents (with the narrowness of the circle seen as limiting) is not explored further. Fichte focuses on the role of the Heroes, men led by Honour and Blessedness²⁷ to advance Mankind to the next age. However, he also discusses the notion of «true meaning of the Author»²⁸ which will be popular in the hermeneutical conversation. Underneath certain idiosyncrasies (e.g. Fichte is

²⁷ Cf. Lecture 3 and 4 of *Characteristics*.

²⁸ *Characteristics*, Lecture 6, p. 37.

convinced that the 'leading principle', to which Reason can relate, is always contained in the first paragraph²⁹) lies a very insightful theory of reception.

He believes the subject-matter of any text is «in itself, and independently from the Author, definable in this way, and in this»³⁰: this is not a modern conception of the *death of the author*, since Fichte simply believes that both an authentic Author (capable of passing down something) and an authentic reader (or Reviewer, in certain passages) share a participation in the Life of Reason, which belongs to Mankind (and not to the individual). We have evidence of this in his favouring speech over writing: «verbal communication, by continuous discourse or scientific conversation, possesses infinite advantage over the mere dead letter.»³¹ The point is not that the text retains a content independent from the author, it is the *subject* of scientific inquiry that is independent, and the receiver can participate in it by the very act of *trying* to access the author's meaning.

This is true even of 'Literary work': Fichte is convinced that «the sole purpose of such reading is, that the Reader may partake of the inspiration, elevation, and culture of mind which the work may be designed to communicate.»³² Once again, beside a certain degree of apparent contradiction³³ related to the role of

²⁹ *Characteristics*, ibidem.

³⁰ *Characteristics*, ibidem.

³¹ *Characteristics*, ibidem.

³² *Characteristics*, p. 38.

³³ Fichte states that «a writer may often be much better understood by another than by himself» but also affirms that «in order that a work of Art may even come into contact with

Reason in Life, what is relevant to our current discourse is the insistence on the experiential nature of the act of reading, and the *partaking* of the Reader into a certain moment of insight. This, in its raw form, is what we are trying to get to when discussing inheritance. Inheritance cannot be understood as the simple act of reading a text as an object, but as a moment (or a process) of participation in the overarching theme of which the text is only an instrument. Only the appropriation of such a theme as mine, and the inclusion of it into my identity as the Reader (which is the inheritor, not just *a* reader of that particular instance of the content) can constitute a proper process of reception and inheritance. According to Fichte, Genius is a fundamental trait for the survival of literary and scientific works from an age to another, but we will come back to that when discussing legacy.

We must depart from Fichte, who in the rest of the book deals with a socio-cultural analysis of his contemporaneity and his vision of the future³⁴. What we are left with is this description of an Age as something “shared” and participated by individuals with different levels of awareness and Bildung. This age is the time *of* the reader. What does this mean? Certainly, there must be a chronological coincidence: we started our discussion of period and age precisely from the notion of an

our minds, and we ourselves enter in communion with it, it must first of all be understood.» - *Characteristics*, ibidem.

³⁴He foresees a time in which the «principle of the Incomprehensible» will reign and the Age of Reason as Knowledge will «lay down as a fundamental principle that everything, even the Unknown itself, as the limit of the Known, and as the only possible pledge that the domain of the Known is exhausted, must be comprehended» *Characteristics*, Lecture 8, p. 46.

extended now in which the process of inheritance was contained. The time *of* the inheritor (as age) must overlap with both the moment of access to the content (the time *of* the inheritance) and with the time of his construction of a system of thought (the time of his Inheritance collectively intended). However, as we have seen, the age is not strictly chronological, since it is characterized more by the individual's access to contents (both potential and actualized) than it is by the situation of the average member of this age.

A problematic aspect is the relation between cultural density and the *situation* (intended as the individual's position in his age) of the Reader. We should avoid falling into the easy trap of defining cultural density as determined by the situation and the situation as founded upon cultural density. Cultural density must be understood always in terms of mere potentiality, as the sum of potential access to content. Therefore, the *situation* of the inheritor must have its foundational elements in the post-interpretation space, which is, after all, the space in which the inheritor acts and speaks and writes. Some of the elements of this *situation* will thus be determined by his own doing (as the self-shaped status of the inheritor before this one specific process of inheritance), while others will be originated *outside* his system of thought, in a social space.

Why *situation* and not Age, then? We have discussed how innovative (compared to other cultural-evolution theories) Fichte's position was, and how his intuition of different ages coexisting simultaneously *in different men* was an acknowledgment of a difference inside a cultural block. Nonetheless, the heavily

charged notion of Age as manifestation of the idea of Epoch is incompatible with a phenomenology of Inheritance willing to get rid of preconceived notions like that of metaphysical ideas “manifesting” themselves into Being. Moreover, the role of the individual needs to be stressed even more, since reducing differences to either being ahead or behind one’s time not only implies a notion of *value* applied to human culture (not only globally but also individual) which amounts to cultural supremacism, but also fails to recognize the complex relation between an individual and the cultural milieu surrounding him *beside* the formation received in his adolescent years.

Tradition, we said in the introduction, is a source of authority and validation, or lack thereof. Arendt provides us with a brilliant description of the relation of truth (or the truth-value of a content) to tradition:

Tradition transforms truth into wisdom, and wisdom is the consistence of transmissible truth. [...] Even if truth should appear in our world, it could not lead to wisdom, because it would no longer have the characteristics which it could acquire only through universal recognition of its validity.³⁵

In matters of inheritance, therefore, Tradition is a border, a restraining line which inheritance is bound to cross. This is, *in nuce*, the striking point of contrast

³⁵ Hannah Arendt, “Introduction”, in Benjamin, Walter, Hannah Arendt, and Harry Zohn. *Illuminations*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968, p. 41.

between Inheritance and Tradition, of which the former is thought being a subset or synonym. In a cultural space governed by Tradition, personal inheritance has neither space nor reason to be. If the only transmissible truth is wisdom, as a content backed by authority, only breaking with this authority can the reader become an inheritor, making the content *his* and not *our*.

Objection: why cannot I inherit my Tradition, the one I belong to? There are multiple reasons. First of all, if one can certainly “belong” to a tradition, the opposite is not true. Having a Tradition that is *mine* would mean having a certain degree of control or at least influence over it, it would mean having a say in the validation of its contents. This, however, would break the very notion of tradition, which, as Arendt points out, relies on the universality of validation. This universality (being obviously not a matter of being shared by *all men*, since multiple traditions can exist side by side in the same age) should be understood specifically as the negation of individuality. My validation of the content-truth is irrelevant to the Tradition, and it must be so, for it to be indeed a Tradition³⁶.

Secondly, if it were possible for the Tradition to be properly mine, changing approach and shifting from a Tradition to another would be a) transformative for the entire corpus of tradition (not just for me) and b) a process of modification. Instead, if I were to “modify” my Tradition (and the weirdness of this notion is due

³⁶ We will see in Chapter 4 how even the Inheritee needs to be made irrelevant and de-individualized to become a part of tradition, and how Legacy (like Inheritance) is made impossible inside tradition.

exactly to the estrangement between our belonging to Traditions but Tradition not belonging to us) a certain caesura would be present in my development as a thinker (in my Inheritance), while the Traditions from and to I was switching my intellectual allegiance would remain functionally unmodified.

Therefore, Tradition is not mine, but only ours. I am (or can be) part of a tradition, but “my Tradition” is a senseless expression. The illusion of participation remains on a praxis level, since we cannot *be* tradition. Once again: we may well belong to a Tradition, but no Tradition can belong to us. My Inheritance, and every instance of inheritance of which it is the aggregate, happens in a *situation* defined by multiple factors, of which Traditions are certainly an important part. Nonetheless, the notion of validation of an inheritance, which lies in its very happening, since the process of modification of our Inheritance is in itself its justification, clashes with the claim by Tradition to have a say in what is of worth and valid.

Foucault believes that historiography has been able to overcome its reliance on Tradition and move toward a most efficient interpretation focused on the object (at least since 1950). The shift, he believes, occurred when we renounced an overarching theme of *memory* and focused on the content as the force behind history: «the document is not the fortunate tool of a history that is primarily and fundamentally *memory*; history is one way in which a society recognizes and develops a mass of documentation with which it is inextricably linked.»³⁷ He claims

³⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the discourse on language*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, p. 7.

that, in post-WWII European cultural discourses, tradition (as a form of collective memory reducing the document/content to its tool) has begun losing its ground as a prime factor in the analysis of cultural history: «the problem is no longer one of tradition [...] but one of division, of limits.»³⁸

We should not mistakenly ascribe to Foucault a theory of inheritance: he remains strongly interested in History intended as a collective process in which the individual interpreter, just like the single document, is just a moment of a larger, social enterprise. However, when he explains how each access to a content needs to happen outside any “synthesis” (since all syntheses are to be questioned) he creates a space of absolute instantaneity which is the same as what we are trying to get to. What he reduces to discontinuity (claiming that even the unity of a book or of an author’s *oeuvre* need to be fragmented into contents) is the act of signification, of seeing the interpreted content for what it is, and not as related to a predetermined horizon. He notes that

“Tradition” is intended to give a special temporal status to a group of phenomena that are both successive and identical; it makes it possible to rethink the dispersion of history in the form of the same; [...] tradition enables us to isolate the new against a background of permanence, and to transfer its merit to originality, to genius, to the decisions proper to individuals.³⁹

³⁸ Foucault, *The Archeology...*, p. 5.

³⁹ Foucault, *The Archeology...*, p. 21.

In getting rid of tradition as a surpassed tool for the thematization of cultural history, Foucault describes the moment of interpretation as an occurrence of *irruption* that replaces the *infinite continuity* of tradition.

The same rupture is required for the process of Inheritance to take place. Where this differs from Foucault, then, is in the moment of reconstruction after this methodological deconstruction: Foucault is developing a general theory of History, and thus pushes back into anonymity the eruption of individual genius which was crucial to his notion of discourse. Nonetheless, what he says about the event is fundamental to our inquiry into inheritance. He warns us against the «naïveté of chronology»⁴⁰ and the tendency to consider any event as simply a re-commencement of a previous, uninterrupted flux of happenings. He wants us to renounce the idea that everything that is presented in a documental form to our historical view must be conceived as expression and continuation of previous cultural forms, identified as its *causes*. The singularity of the event-document is to be acknowledged and preserved if we want to be freed from the myth of the «already said.»⁴¹

However, this notion of the event as absolutely singular highlights a dialectic tension internal to Inheritance, which is both an event *and* a process:

- On the one hand, the awareness of events that happened *before* and *up to* the moment of attention is what makes Inheritance valuable, tying the reading to

⁴⁰ Foucault, *The Archeology...*, p. 25 ff.

⁴¹ Foucault, *The Archeology...*, p. 25.

the knowledge that its content was *transmitted* to us. The document itself, as an object and as a bearer of content, is testimony of continuity. Chronology matters, insofar as the inheritor understands that the content is there not by accident, but by a series of events that begins with an intellectual moment and that entails the formation of a potential legacy, the preservation of the document, the entrance of both into the range of the inheritor's own cultural density and the historical situation allowing the content to be *meaningful* to him and to his system of thought (is Inheritance as large). The being-there of the content (which is absolute and pre-interpretational at the stage of cultural density) has been replaced with a being-in-the-situation (a being "now" which the historical *now* and not the *now* of absolute contemporaneity that we previously addressed when dealing with the turning of attention). Without an historical perspective, reading cannot become inheritance.

- On the other hand, Inheritance is a transformative process. Repetition and re-presentation do not constitute a genuine inheritance, if we intend them as just the new offer of something that is grounded in the past, belongs to the past and is only witnessed by a spectator in the *now* of its re-presentation. For a process of reception to be an inheritance, it needs to be freed from the shackles of the situation of the author, the inheritee. The event-inheritance makes use of but does not coincide with the event-document that is fixed in the past and indissolubly linked to its moment of origin. While the content of the document may be the same at the moment of its creation and at the

moment in which it is accessed by the inheritor (at the turning of attention), the historicized interpretation transforms the received content by the very act of reading it on an horizon of historicity. Ironically, the very openness of historical awareness to chronology (although arguably without the naïveté of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*) creates the conditions for the process of inheritance to be ‘a beginning and not a re-commencement’.

Foucault’s methodological hypothesis is fascinating, but strikes the reader as quite abstract when he does not go into details as to how this detachment from the naïveté of chronology should be made actual. Indeed, it could be argued that even reading something as “unrelated” to the past would be a form of historical acknowledgment. Therefore, true detachment would be impossible, if chronology was to be forgotten or pushed out of the field of our historical consciousness. We have to assume that Foucault is referring to a self-created value of the historical interpretation process, which is the same that I advocate here for inheritance. The notion of discontinuity as a methodologically imposed limit thus need to be addressed for inheritance as well, if we want to understand inheritance as a form of historically informed act of reading, as we are trying to do in Foucault’s model.

But what is discontinuity in the inheritance discourse and how does it affect the inheritor’s access to the content of the document? Going back to the role of tradition in regards to inheritance(s), we explained how tradition constitutes a limit, and not a facilitator. There lies the possibility of discontinuity. Even when receiving a traditional (i.e. a tradition-approved) content and subjecting it to a process of

interpretation, the inheritor steps beyond the limits of the already-said, by modifying the content or by generating a series of contents that depend upon it and were not there in the original formulation. Discontinuity does not necessarily involve dissociation and renunciation (as certain passages in Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge* seem to imply), but it can consist in a new system of relation. If, as we said with Locke, relation is central to the construction of complex ideas, then constructing a different system of relations involves a modification of a complex idea. In other words, even assuming that a content C is received identical as C' in the inheritor's Inheritance (I), the system in which it was collocated (S) will differ from the one of the receiver (I). This will be relevant for the discussion of negative reception, and we will go back to that then. For now, it suffices to establish that only this discontinuity in systems - I(C') being different than S(C) - can disclose the space for an inheritance, while at the same time satisfying Foucault's call for a disruption of continuity in our approach to the problem of History.

The relevance of the moment, of the event-inheritance as relevant per se and not only as part of a succession of moments strides with the notion of disappearance, which is strictly ingrained into our vision of history. The very notion of historical horizon implies the reduction of the personality of actors to their role in the history that we are analyzing. «Time is the element of invisibility»⁴² - writes Derrida - and this goes beyond reflections on the ephemerality of human memory. The circle of time, the one day after another, cannot provide the space for an

⁴² Jacques Derrida. *Given Time: I*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

absolutely individual moment, according to Derrida. The problem of visibility (and conversely of invisibility) is one that matters the most to Legacy, not to Inheritance, which is concerned with its contemporaneity, with what was accessible (as cultural density), has been accessed (with attention) and is deemed valuable to be retained (thus becoming inheritance) in the present.

Nonetheless, the event needs to be understood as such, as a process (of interpretation and of inheritance) that happens now and not at another time. Breaking with the naïveté of chronology is not enough, a break from the naïveté of time, so to speak, is also required. The inheritor renounces the circle, the inevitability of transmission (which is proper to Tradition) and *chooses*. He chooses the *when* (now, and not before), the *what* (this content that is relevant to him) and most importantly the *why* of his process of inheritance: not only the tautological but self-affirming 'I choose this because it interests me' but also the tradition-defying 'because this is valuable, *more* so than other contents provided by tradition.'

Foucault's and Derrida's visions require us to go beyond not only the «Cartesian method of verifiability»⁴³ focusing on universals, but even beyond the ancients' method revived by Hegel («all method is tied to the object-itself»⁴⁴): Gadamer rightly calls for a new kind of historical knowledge whose aim «is not that of explaining a concrete phenomenon as a particular case of a general rule, [but] to

⁴³ Gadamer, "Problèmes Épistémologiques des Sciences Humaines", in Gadamer, *Le Problème de la Conscience Historique*, Paris: Seuil, 1996. p. 29

⁴⁴ Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, vol II, p. 486.

understand an historical phenomenon in its singularity.»⁴⁵ Inheritance, however, requires an ulterior step: after the disruption of history and tradition (formulated more clearly by Foucault, and shown as necessary by Gadamer) we need to find another unifying principle, if we want to understand why not all interpretation is retained, and understood as relevant, by the interpreter.

This principle of re-unification is nothing else than the unified Inheritance of the inheritor. What Gadamer's early theory of interpretation lacks - if it needs to account for the absolute autonomy of the process of inheritance - is precisely the notion of rupture that we have found in Foucault: the German scholar still advocates for the surpassing of opposition between tradition and historical research⁴⁶, without acknowledging the need for a space of discontinuity in which the inheritor's agency can be made explicit.

We said that Tradition demands to be recognized as the source of validation for any content entering its orbit. There is no evaluation of 'rightfulness' before the process of Inheritance, nor is it characterized by the 'correct' interpretation of the content. Even assuming a content could be misinterpreted (which would presume either a "true" gnoseological meaning or the adherence to authorial intent), this would be irrelevant to Inheritance, since the very process of accessing the content has already made it possible, and the eventual integration of the *perceived* truth of

⁴⁵ Gadamer, "Problèmes...", p. 31

⁴⁶ Cf. Gadamer, "Martin Heidegger and the meaning of his 'Hermeneutics of Facts' for the Human Sciences" in Gadamer, *Le Problème de la Conscience Historique*, Paris: Seuil, 1996.

the content (or of the derived negation-al content⁴⁷) in the inheritor's system of thought would be enough to classify the process as a full experience of inheritance.

Nonetheless, a judgment of value and a judgment of truth are undoubtedly present *during* the process of inheritance, and they constitute a crucial axis of the inheritor's initiative. We have already discussed in chapter two how the turning of attention implies a pre-judgment of importance, which we reduced to a tautological "my interest lies with what I am interested in". When we move to the inheritance process (and thus to a status of extended attentiveness, in contrast to momentous attention) this judgment can either be confirmed or denied.

If the informed judgment is one of irrelevance, the process of inheritance breaks down. What the situation and the concurring Tradition's authorities could not do, disinterest can. If the to-be-inheritor finds the accessed content to be non-relevant, he will discard it. Here is where inheritance differs from the simple act of reading/listening and from the process of interpretation, which are both fundamental to it but do not exhaust its phenomenality.

We engaged tradition because we were discussing time, and to time we need to return; any inheritance deals with two times: the 'now', the present, however conceived (we discussed many notions of "now" all applicable to the process of inheritance) and the 'then', the 'before' (and thus not-now) that characterizes the origin of the content we inherit. The two times are not equivalent to inheritance: contemporaneity, 'now', is essential to the process, it is the only space in which we

⁴⁷ I will delve into this in a few pages.

can conceive the act of inheriting as alive, not yet consigned to a documental state, nor to chronology or (if case may be) mutated in turn into a legacy.

What is, then, the role of the past, the 'before', in the scope of inheritance? There is no doubt that such a dimension of time needs to be addressed: the inheritor always realizes that the content he is accessing was created before the moment in which he accesses it. How can this 'other time' be conflated into the 'now' that we have described as the only time to which inheritance can properly belong?

Augustine was well aware of the problems connected with the necessity of accounting for a time that was not the 'now' he was living in; although his problem was one of justifying the very existence of time (and thus of movement and world) faced to the doubts of Skeptics, his analysis of the aporia of time, which he carries out in his *Confessions*⁴⁸, will provide us with some useful tools for an analogous discussion. Augustine believes that time is intimately tied with our consciousness of the world, but that our notion of it is hardly transferable into a clear, understandable and communicable statement: «*Quid est ergo tempus? Si nemo ex me quærat, scio; si quærenti explicare uelim, nescio*»⁴⁹ [«What is, then, time? If no one asks me, I know what it is; but if I wish to explain it to those who ask, then I do not know»]. At the same time, though, he feels that before trying to come to such an understanding, we should at first solve the aporia of time, that he summarizes so:

⁴⁸ Cf. in particular books 14 and 28.

⁴⁹ *Confessions*, 11:14. Translation mine.

Yet I say with confidence that I know that if nothing passed away, there would be no past time; and if nothing were still coming, there would be no future time; and if there were nothing at all, there would be no present time.

But, then, how is it that there are the two times, past and future, when even the past is now no longer and the future is now not yet? But if the present were always present, and did not pass into past time, it obviously would not be time but eternity. If, then, time present--if it be time--comes into existence only because it passes into time past, how can we say that even this is, since the cause of its being is that it will cease to be? Thus, can we not truly say that time *is* only as it tends toward nonbeing? ⁵⁰

To try to resolve such a problematic point, Augustine develops a theory of what he calls *the threefold present*, saying that memory and expectation are the way in which our mind collapses past and future into our present⁵¹. Insofar as inheritance is concerned, we have to worry only about the past, since it is impossible for an inheritor to access a content that is yet to be created. Augustin

⁵⁰ «Fidenter tamen dico scire me quod, si nihil præteriret, non esset præteritum tempus, et si nihil adueniret, non esset futurum tempus, et si nihil esset, non esset præsens tempus. Duo ergo illa tempora, præteritum et futurum, quomodo sunt, quando et præteritum iam non est et futurum nondum est? Præsens autem si semper esset præsens nec in præteritum transiret, non iam esset tempus, sed æternitas. Si ergo præsens, ut tempus sit, ideo fit, quia in præteritum transit, quomodo et hoc esse dicimus, cui causa, ut sit, illa est, quia non erit, ut scilicet non uere dicamus tempus esse, nisi quia tendit non esse?» - Augustin, *Confessions*, 11:14, translated by Albert C. Outler.

⁵¹ «Mens [...] et expectat, et attendit, et meminit», *Confessions*, 28:38

writes that the passing of time (and not time itself) is what we experience, and what our concept of time must depend upon.

To recall the past into our present (via memory⁵²) is the way for the mind to give account of the passing of time in regards to what was before. The document – the container of the content – is a crystallized memory: our *personal* memory (as a faculty of the mind/soul in Augustinian terms⁵³) is not the initiator of the process of recovery. The past is made present *in front of* our witnessing intellect, not by its own doing. Intelligence (in its etymologic meaning of *intellig-entia*, ‘capacity to understand’, *intelligo/ere*), not memory, is the function of our mind that makes the past alive and present *in* the present of our ad-tending consciousness. But what is the document, insofar as we are reading it? Ricoeur identifies this act of recreation of the past as narrative:

Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.⁵⁴

⁵² Augustine writes that «The time present of things past is memory; the time present of things present is direct experience; the time present of things future is expectation.» (*Confessions*, 11:26, Outler’s translation.) We deal here with memory, and we will discuss expectation even more, when analyzing the perspective of the inheritee who foresees a recipient for his words, in chapters 4 and 5.

⁵³ Bonaventure gives a wonderful depiction of an Augustinian theory of intellect/mind/soul in his *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum*.

⁵⁴ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, vl. 1, p. 52.

The time that is “yet to become” human is to be intended as time as an abstract concept, something that could exist before consciousness and that would require an explanation as independent from consciousness, the explanation that Augustine sees as philosophically impossible, *si quarenti explicare*. Making the time human means to bring it into our conscious present, which is re-narrated not just as a dull self-standing and non-conceptualized ‘now’, but as a mediated ‘now’ that has a ‘before’, testified to by the document, in need of an overarching narration.

Our reception of the document constitutes the narration, the content is conveyed by it. The document is *emplotted*⁵⁵, insofar as the content is depicted onto the background of time. Narration equates historicisation, it is not limited to fiction but not even to the telling of events. Ricoeur tells us that Narration is *mimesis*, and that the textual configuration (Mimesis 2, or the *document* in simpler terms) is a medium between prefiguration (Mimesis 1, the narrated content) and reception (Mimesis 3, i.e. inheritance).

According to Ricoeur, the content carries with it the *identifying action*, a process of meaning that others have attributed to the author: for the content to have survived, there must be a meaning attached to it. The *temporalizing action* is what the inheritor carries out through what Ricoeur defines as *symbolization*.⁵⁶ His intuition is correct: to move from the event-content to the event-inheritance, and to

⁵⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 60.

⁵⁶ For a detailed explanation of Ricoeur’s three-part Mimesis, see *Time and Narrative*, particularly III: “Time and Narrative, threefold mimesis”, p. 52 ff.

realize the historicization of the content, we need some sort of symbolization and an actualization of the content, which is provided by narrative. It is not, indeed, a narrative *internal to* and *proper of* the document, but our personal narrative that needs to come to the rescue of the content from the clutches of the (otherwise dead) document.

By inheriting, we present ourselves as inheritors. This is not just a pleonastic reiteration; it is the core of the narrative action required to overcome the distance between the time of the document (the 'before' in which it was composed) and the a-temporal 'now' in which the content is accessed. This can only happen via the construction of a narration in which the present of the inheritor becomes a multifold present in Augustine's sense, able to give account of both the historical present of the inheritor (situated in time but also structured as his 'situation'), and the residual presence of the document, which is narrated into the present and charged with a meaning that is not exhausted by the content but surpasses its borders and draws sense from the historical horizon. It is a narration by the inheritor, for the inheritor and about the inheritor as such.

Once we understand these characteristics of the required narration, we can understand the need for an *agent* with a *cultural network*⁵⁷, required – according to Ricoeur – to identify the relation between the three actions (*identification*, *symbolization* and *temporalization*) and thus achieving emplotment. He mentions this in passing, without any extensive explanation, but given our path so far, we

⁵⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 63.

should not encounter any impasse in our effort to understand this. The agent is the historically aware inheritor, who draws from its *situation* (i.e. the cultural network) - which contains cultural density and social networking but is not exhausted by them – the hermeneutic tools to understand the content *historically*. Foucault's and Ricoeur's perspectives, once again, travel hand in hand: the reduction of the narrative from the level of collective, traditional history to the standpoint of the *agent* implies the disruption of a super-level of cultural network intended as universal.

The inheritor performs his self-narrative, which is threefold:

- a narrative of himself as inheritor: he positions himself not just as the agent of the reading, but as the understand-er and the chronologist of the content through time;
- a narrative of the content as an inheritance, i.e. a content that is subjected to duration through time not only in its physical form (the document) but also in its intellectual form (the symbolic meaning provided by narration extends internal meaning, belonging to the Legacy, into the temporal space of the reader);
- finally, a narrative of the moment of reading as belonging both the 'now' of his situation and to the 'then-and-now' of the content as found in the document (which was made before but exists now).

By doing all this, he carries out the «synthesis of heterogeneous times» which is, in Ricoeur's intentions, the aim of historical awareness, while solving the aporia

of time concerning the mind, which was raised by Augustine. Narrative, thus, is the way in which the 'threefold present' is realized in the cultural space where the agent/inheritor operates. If the threefold present is conjured to the mind by memory and expectation, narration is what makes the past present by the explicitation of its permanence throughout cultural contents. Narration, as Ricoeur concludes in *Time and Narrative*, «marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer/reader»: this intersection, which could be otherwise subject to disappearance (making the past a forgotten past and breaking the manifold of the present once again), finds its permanence in Inheritance.

However, at the very core of historical Narration is our concept of Time, if we are to believe Ricoeur himself.⁵⁸ For centuries, he claims, theories of history were founded upon the notion of a persistent Truth, which should have informed "true" philosophy of history, which would undergo a process of evolution. This, however, created a historiographical perspective which gave no space for individual views and subjectivity: only objectivity and collective history of philosophy (i.e. tradition) were believed to give account of the self-imposing appearance of the events, with the subjectivity of the reader [of the document] being impressed passively by the events.⁵⁹ This, however, failed to address the profound subjectivity implied in our

⁵⁸ Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, op. cit, especially Chapter "Histoire de la Philosophie et l'unité du vrai".

⁵⁹ Ricoeur is here summarizing Thevenaz's position, especially referring to *L'homme et sa raison*. On the relation between the two authors, see Jervolino, "Entre Thévenaz et Ricoeur: la philosophie sans absolu" in Capelle, Philippe, Marie-Dominique Popelard, and Geneviève

conception of time, and incurred the aporia first denounced by Augustine. Ricoeur opposes to this what he calls the *paradoxe vivant* of multiple philosoph-ies (contrasted to one Philosophy), the only way to overcome the *dilemme mortel*⁶⁰ of the aporia.

This amounts to the recognition of “impersonal Weltanschauung”⁶¹ as (improperly) dominating our approach to time and cultural history. Once again, Ricoeur does not fully explain what he means with this expression, but we have to assume that this ‘typology’ of explanation (as he tentatively refers to the impersonal Weltanschauung) coincides with tradition, the great enemy of subjectivity and the advocate of the *one philosophy* throughout history. To all of this, Ricoeur opposes a *prise de conscience*, a philosophical reception of history in which the ‘Long history of consciousness’ can justify and coincide with the ‘Short History of the Self’⁶², rescuing the subjectivity of the interpreter without losing his historical awareness. It is hard to gauge what exactly he makes of teleology in History: while rejected ‘at first’, it seems to be later incorporated in the subjective initiative of the philosopher/interpreter, who asks for (and finds) «le sens de l’Histoire.»⁶³

Hébert. *Le souci de passage. Mélanges offert à Jean Greisch*, ed. Capelle et al., Paris: Beauchesne, 2004, pp. 180-190.

⁶⁰ Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, p. 57

⁶¹ Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, p. 60.

⁶² Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, p. 40.

⁶³ Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, p. 40.

A proper philosophy of history (which corresponds to a philosophy/idea of historiography, and to a philosophical Weltanschauung in general) would then allow the historically aware interpreter/reader (the two terms are used interchangeably throughout *Histoire et Vérité*) to see both *distentio* (crucial for the capacity of the mind to experience time without gaps, according to Augustine) and the particularity of the singular event. This is particularly true, continues Ricoeur, when dealing with another thinker (whose peculiar approach or theme the historical interpreter is interested in): between the receiver (=inheritor) and the previous philosopher (=inheritance) a sort of *friendship* tends to be created, relying on the moment of choice from the inheritor.

But how can the choice of the inheritor create and inform the connection between the authors (and not between the inheritor and the content)? Is this not in conflict with our notion of causality? Shouldn't the cause of the relation be chronologically antecedent to its realization? We will come back to this problem in chapter five. For now, it will suffice to say that we can conceive history of philosophy (and philosophy of history) as a series of connections *à deux* (one-to-one, in pairs), interwoven into a more general awareness of these connections unified into one overarching *historical sense*. Ricoeur states that the subjectivity of a certain philosophy (i.e. a moment in the succession of philosoph-ies) cannot be reduced to the subjectivity of the philosopher performing it: he brings the Kantian idea of understanding the author better than himself to its extreme consequences. However, he immediately reduces the impact of his claim, rephrasing it into a (far

less impactful) evaluation of the life and situation of the author as anecdotic when faced with the task of comprehending his work⁶⁴.

Ricoeur reduces and limits the scope of this friendly connection in order to avoid risking to go back to Schleiermacher's⁶⁵ notion of 'understanding' as relying exclusively on communication, with the "utterance" to be interpreted conceived not in terms of objective content but solely as communication. Schleiermacher claims that the task of the interpreter, in order to bridge the gap in time, is to «place oneself on the same level as the original reader»⁶⁶, in order to grasp the psychological dimension of the communication. Gadamer will later liquidate this as a «divinatory process», but Schleiermacher believes that such an approach would allow us to understand a text «as an aesthetic construct, as a work of art or 'artistic thought'»⁶⁷ and that in artistic thought –as in free dialogue – the content «plays almost no part.»⁶⁸ While Schleiermacher's description of the relation between inheritee and inheritor as a co-participation in artistic thought will be precious when discussing the ensemble of legacy and inheritance, we must be aware that 20th century hermeneutic scholars (including Ricoeur) do not intend to abandon the content

⁶⁴ Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, p. 58 ff.

⁶⁵ Schleiermacher, Friedrich, and Andrew Bowie. *Schleiermacher: "Hermeneutics and Criticism"*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Ch. 15 and 16 in particular.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Hans Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Method*, New York: Crossroad, 1975, p. 168.

⁶⁷ Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, ed. Odebrecht, p. 569, quoted in Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 165.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 572.

completely. Contrary to Schleiermacher (who believes that «True historical significance rises above history. Phenomena exist, like miracles, only to direct our attention towards the Spirit that playfully generates them»⁶⁹), Ricoeur believes that the phenomenon of the document has a content value to be preserved, which makes it even harder to fully understand the scope of this sort of chronologically dichotomous friendship.

Ricoeur's connections/friendships⁷⁰ between inheritor and inheritee is not parallel to *distentio* and continuity, which fall in the realm of historical tradition: establishing an absolute discontinuity between the two philosophies allows us to construct them as *true* insofar as they answer to the problems they disclose; discontinuity breaks the need of an unified teleological meaning and allows for the same question (=content) to be shared by two different subjectivities immersed in different situations, and thus producing different end results (inheritances). The

⁶⁹ Quoted in Dilthey, *Das Leben Schleiermachers*, 1st ed, Appendix, p. 117.

⁷⁰ The notion of identification between the philosopher and his predecessors reminds us of Feuerbach, with his «insofar as I think, I am *all men*» (*Thoughts on Death and Immortality*, p. 19). However, what was a reflection on the shared faculty of thought as main identifier of the Human Race as a whole becomes in Ricoeur a strictly experiential (and not ontological) concern. Moreover, the friendship-like status of the relation is not between the inheritor and the authors of the *philosophies antérieures* (see footnote 62) considered as a group of predecessors, but with each and everyone of them, considered in the absolute individuality of the moment of inheritance (of which the inheritor is protagonist and to which the inheritee participate only insofar as he is part of this 'friendship').

reconstruction of a history of discontinuity cannot happen elsewhere than in the situation of the inheritor:

There is a history only because previous philosophies are part of the memory and of the situation of the new philosopher. But all of us contain somehow in ourselves [all of] past history, in an historical moment which constitutes a sort of absolute.⁷¹

Such a description is fascinating but problematic: if the author-inheritee is *englobé* (incorporated) by the situation of the author-inheritor, how can we preserve that feeling of reciprocal friendship-like connection that Ricoeur was proposing as informing the inheritance moment? The focus' shift from the inheritee to his philosophy (one among others *philosophies antécédent*) has allowed the transformation of the latter from an objective cause (as perceived by tradition-based philosophy of history) into one of the «aspects of his [of the new philosopher] *situation fondamentale*.»⁷²

With the completion of the process of inheritance, the content is detached from the (problematic) relation inheritor-inheritee and becomes a part of the

⁷¹«Il n'y a une histoire que parce que les philosophies antérieures font partie de la mémoire et de la situation du nouveau philosophe; mais chacun englobe en quelque sorte l'histoire passée en lui, dans un moment historique qui est une sorte d'absolu.» Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, p. 63, translation mine. We will come back to this passage in chapter 4, where the translation of “englober” will be addressed directly.

⁷² Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, p. 64.

inheritor's Inheritance, to which the Ricoeurian «situation fondamentale» appears to correspond. The truth-value of the process-inheritance takes the place traditionally held by Truth (capitalized) intended as identifiable and transmissible. Such a 'monadic, monolithic definition of Truth is renounced in favor of a communal and communicational truth, a *symphilosophieren*⁷³: in place of a Truth with one source (authority, or tradition), the *sym-* (co-) *philosophieren* (philosophizing) gives rise to a *new* truth, non-absolute and resulting from an interaction between the two protagonists. This would bridge the gap between the objectivity of time as chronology and the absolute present brought forward by subjectivity. Once again, the mortal dilemma has become, in Ricoeur's eyes, a living and prolific paradox.

At the core of this *symphilosophieren*, which transcends history chronologically intended to disclose a more truthful history of shared consciousness, we find the notion of truth as multidimensional. Ricoeur perceives the idea of scientific, verifiable truth as the biggest argument in favor of the monism of truth that we had dismissed alongside tradition (as incapable of accounting for subjectivity in the situation). However, he correctly notices how even experimental science is an event of cultural history, requiring a subject-man in a circular relation with the object-man. This cultural paradigm has permeated the situation of almost any of us, to the point that we can "feel" the infinity of the sky, the radiations of light, the hormones of others. But the very fact that the belief in experimental validation

⁷³ Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, p. 68.

has a personal connection to our subjectivity proves that even scientific truth is susceptible to a communicational dimension of its informing philosophy.⁷⁴

We must ask, though, how can such a integration, this *englobement*, be possible? The ‘now’ of the inheritor is not any other ‘now’. It is not the contemporaneity of the inheritee (no matter how close in time the event-document was originated) but it is also not the ‘now’ of his contemporaneity at large. It is impossible to experience Culture as a moment of individual life, and only some of its elements can be relevant in the inheritor’s situation. However, we cannot simply understand the integration of the inheritee (and of his subjectivity) into the situation (of the inheritor) as its being subsumed into a common cultural memory: otherwise, we would fall back to a theory of tradition overshadowing the value of individual subjectivity. If we were to understand this subsumption as the content being “already there” in a shared space, then we would be simply defining the *conditions* for the inheritance (or the historically aware reception, in Ricoeur’s words) to happen, and saying nothing about it per se.

This identification between the content as-of-the-inheritor and the content-as-of-the-inheritee must thus find its space in the discontinuity of history (and truth) that we have been exploring with both Foucault and Ricoeur. Such a contact may happen in the space of contemporaneity. We have said that the ‘now’ of the inheritor differs from the ‘now’ of the inheritee: the inheritor perceives the time of creation as different from and antecedent to the time of his process of inheritance.

⁷⁴ Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, Ch. 6, “Vérité et Mensogne”.

Even when the two are contemporary (e.g. when listening to someone speaking) the latter begins when the former ends. The speaker's uttering of the words constitutes the end of his process of creation, while the inheritor begins his process (of hearing, understanding and inheriting) after they are uttered. Moreover, we have seen how both are not simply coincident with their position in an evolutionary (and processional) history of culture, but are defined by the status of the inheritor and by his memory.

Nonetheless, precisely this absoluteness of the two 'now's can constitute the bridge between the situation of the inheritor and the contemporaneity of the inheritee, which is reconstructed as a projection in 'memory' (although the status of this memory is problematic, since it does not belong to the inheritor's mind, and it is hardly definable as belonging to a 'collective mind' of sorts). Presence, therefore, is what connects the present of the inheritor with the re-presented present of the inheritee: the latter is past-made-present from the standpoint of the inheritor, whose subjectivity is the only active one in his situation, but not the only one to have a presence.

Gadamer tackled the role of memory - as key to historical reconstruction and to the reception of contents - in the very first chapter of his *Truth and Method*. He intuited that in the context of cultural reception, memory could not be understood merely as a faculty (of the mind): «remembering, forgetting and recalling belong to the historical constitution of man and are themselves part of his history and his

Bildung.»⁷⁵ He gives Bildung and memory a foundational role, since he believes they constitute the *sense* for an educated (gebildet) consciousness. But once we agree that memory is not just a natural faculty of the mind, but a performative approach to the world of cultural contents, we are called to clarify the space of action of such a force.

The relation between Bildung – which Gadamer defines as Culture+Formatio – and inheritance is complicated; on the one hand, Bildung seems to be a section of the situation informed by personality and personal history, and thus we could construct it as a product of Inheritance, or even re-define it as identical; other passages, however, seem to hint to a non-inherited Bildung, one that is not entirely personal. This would reduce Bildung to an expansion of the situation, and reverse the hierarchy between the two.

Gadamer's construction of Bildung seems to include Sensus Communis, which Gadamer sees as similar to phronesis in Aristotle. Nonetheless, contrary to Vico's view and to what the expression suggests, there seems to be something deeply individual in the way common sense is used here. We are reminded of Bergson, who as we said thought that

⁷⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 16

«Common sense refers to the social milieu [...] like the other senses put us into relation with things, the common sense presides over our relations with things.»⁷⁶

If we apply what we have been discussing so far, the social dimension of *sensus communis* is strongly reduced, and replaced by an idea of 'circumstantial explanation' that is more one of discontinuity than it is of communality.

This primacy of historical awareness over the factuality of time understood as a series of *facti bruti gravitates* around the notion of recognition. The content as inheritance is recognized

- a) as available and having limits: it needs to be identified (recognized) as a coherent object for our historical interpretation. A discontinuity from the historical accumulation of the period needs to be forced upon "the past" intended as a mass of documents. This fracturing of documental unity and the choice of this one content over the many others which have been accessed are based upon a judgment of value;
- b) the content is recognized as original (being proper to that document, not to another) and real=true. According to Gadamer, Reality is the "untransformed world of possibilities".

⁷⁶ «Le bon sens refer à le milieu social [...] tandis que les autres sens nous mettent en rapport avec de choses, le bon sens preside à nos relations avec des personnes.» Bergson, Henri. *Ecrits Et Paroles*. Paris: Presses Univ. de France, 1959, p. 89. Translation is mine

Therefore, recognition is not only knowing again something that was previously known. It implies an awareness (be it aesthetic or historical, with the two coinciding in Gadamer's work) that orients the recognition itself, but that modifies itself in the process.

Gadamer is right in pointing out that receiving a content does not rely on a faculty (memory), and indicating the three factors contributing to this process of historical appropriation. Beside remembering (accessing the content, reading the document, etc.) he correctly points out that forgetting has a crucial role too: once again, we should not understand forgetting as the simple disappearance of an image, but as an historical process which is as part of the shaping of our Inheritance as remembering (and retaining) is. Limitation, the disruption of continuity, is required to provide an identifiable content, and more generally a unity of a system allowing the inheritor to have a cultural dimension that is his own (and not 'of his time' or even 'of Humanity' at large).

Borges, more than any theorist, gives a fascinating rendition of the problem in his novella, titled in Spanish *Funes el Memorioso*.⁷⁷ There, the poor country boy turned into «an untamed and vernacular Zarathustra» succumbs to its own talent of absolute and prodigious memory. The impossibility of restricting mnemonic retention causes him to be incapable of «platonic ideas» and even of recognizing himself in the mirror, since persistence of the image in time becomes ungraspable

⁷⁷ Borges, *Funes the Memoriosus*.

among the infinite retention of circumstantial differences.⁷⁸ Our capability of distinguishing ourselves as individual agents in the cultural environment relies on our ability of creating limits to what belongs to our cultural density at first and our cultural Inheritance more completely. Our cultural identity (our Inheritance) relies on the possibility of rejecting certain contents and ignoring others, thus shaping our remembrance in the process of delimiting our cultural reception.

Recalling, the third pole of our process of historical *prise de conscience*, relates to repetition. It is the point of encounter of remembering and forgetting, and goes along the lines of repetition of what was said before, not as witnessed but as recalled. We recalled what we have decided to remember, and we do so by repeating it. Repetition «expresses at once a singularity opposed to the general, a universality opposed to the particular, a distinctive opposed to the ordinary, an instantaneity opposed to variation, and an eternity opposed to permanence»⁷⁹, and is once again called to conciliate the opposite needs of our idea of History as duration and of our experience of the incommensurably instantaneous process of interpretation. There is nothing mechanical nor dull in the post-structuralist and post-modern idea of repetition (which, I would argue, is coherent with the recalling process advocated by Gadamer): the awareness that there is nothing unavoidable and ontologically *historical* in the document invests the choice of the inheritor (*qua* repeater) of an

⁷⁸ All quotes are taken from Borges, "Funes the Memorius" in Jorge Luis Borges, Anthony Kerrigan, et al. *Ficciones*. New York: Grove Press, 1962, p. 107-116.

⁷⁹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 3.

importance that was absent in traditional and tradition-oriented theories of transmission.

Once we have freed the inheritor from the burden of adhering to a theoretical “progression of philosophy” and a global view of time, we can bracket everything exceeding the moment of inheritance from our consideration: we are left with an author of the text present *only* as the author (and not, as Schleiermacher saw him, as a personality in communication with another throughout time), and an inheritor who is willingly approaching the content, and who is choosing to retain such a content, making it part of his own Inheritance. The Hegelian notion of *Historical Individual* perfectly fits the inheritor, insofar as he becomes the maker of his past, and of all relevant past. By making *certain* contents part of his Inheritance, he is reducing history to *his* History, without any residual influence from outside teleological consideration. The situation, which can influence his cultural density and even his interest, is exhausted in the moment of agency. The individual reader is rescued from the burden of humanity, and makes the content (and the author of that content) part of his inheritance, with no regards for what Gadamer (with Droysen) called “ethical commonality”, the overall cultural dimension informing the acts of society.

We have mentioned judgment of “value” as a central dynamic to the process of inheritance. The switch from the turning of *attention* (absolutely momentous) to

the extended process of inheritance (which relies on *attentiveness*⁸⁰) is consistent with a move from an impression of interest to a judgment of worthiness. I turn my attention to a content (be it a text, a discourse, a painting, etc.) because I believe this *could* be relevant, because it *interests* me. This equates to a daring investment of my time and intellectual energies: based on what I know about the document, I access it looking for interesting content. Only during and after the interpretation following this hopeful access, I can determine (with an absolutely personal judgment) whether the interest was well placed, and the content is indeed relevant *to me*.

This is what differentiates a theory of inheritance from a theory of interpretation: while some reception theorists have recognized the role of prejudices⁸¹ (and thus of biases, of which ‘interest’ is one) in our interpretational process, their aim was to explain how to become aware of those in order to obtain a

⁸⁰ See ch. 2, especially p. XX

⁸¹ E.g. Gadamer, *The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem*, In *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Berkeley : University of California Press, 1976, p. 9 reads «it is not so much our judgments as it is our prejudices that constitute our being». We must keep in mind that what is translated with “prejudice” is the German word *Vorurteil*, more aptly translated by Frenchmen as *préjugé* (and not *prejudice*), which could be rendered as *pre-judgment*, without introducing the problematic notion of prejudice, which, in English, is connected to unreflective bias. It is interesting to notice, though, that most of what he considers “prejudices” going into the hermeneutical process could be defined as judgments on previous matters and not as depending on social factors. The decision not to focus on the construction of one’s system of thought (or Inheritance) but to deal with the condition of the single instance of interpretation prevents insights like these from developing into a theory of interest, among other things.

‘more true’ interpretation. Vice versa, Inheritance self-justifies it, and we experience this, unaware, every time we retain a content (remembering it and forgetting others): there is not a “correct” way to inherit, as long as we are aware of the fact that inheritance is happening and our Inheritance is being modified. If ‘historical awareness’ was needed *in order to* access a proper hermeneutic, historical self-awareness is *all that is needed* insofar Inheritance is concerned. The judgment of value is always already cast and it would be meaningless to question it, since the only judgment expressed is ‘this content is relevant to me’. Inheritance, being an absolutely personal phenomenon, relies on tautologies both before (see attention and the correlated ‘I am interested in what interests me’) and after it is processed (‘I recall this because it is worth for me to recall it’).

While discussing the ‘Logical use of the understanding in general’, Kant writes that «Judgment is therefore the mediate cognition of an object, hence the representation of a representation of it. In every Judgment there is a concept that holds of many and that among this many also comprehends a given representation, which is then related immediately to the object.»⁸² Therefore, we must recognize in a judgment a moment of intellectual synthesis (the mediate cognition), which is both reproductive (since it is a representation) and reflective (a representation of a representation) but at the same time is productive, since the judgment is always a new judgment, despite being immediately related to the object. The category of such

⁸² Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and edited by Paul Guyer, Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 205

a judgment (the concept that holds of many) is not negated by the immediacy of its objective content. In this sense, the notion of Inheritance, on which the judgment of value is to be exerted, is represented as an object, and represented as an object that is 'worthy'.

«All judgments are functions of unity among our representations, since instead of an immediate representation a higher one, which comprehends this and other representations under itself, is used for the cognition of the object, and many possible cognitions are thereby drawn together into one.»⁸³ This definition is crucial to the aim we have stated: the unifying value of any judgment and its capability of subsuming many representations is essential in the self-referential judgment on the 'right' inheritance, which amounts to a judgment *about* our «faculty of judging.»⁸⁴

Approaching 'The logical form of all judgments', Kant defines again judgment, this time as «nothing other than the way to bring given cognitions to the objective unity of apperception. That is the aim of the copula is in them: to distinguish the objective unity of given representations from the subjective.»⁸⁵ This definition is open to a certain degree of interpretation, but nevertheless we can state that judgment carries an objectivity, which is not in the intuition itself but derives from the laws of association that are carried on in the moment of Judgment.

⁸³ Kant, *ibidem*.

⁸⁴ Kant, *ibidem*.

⁸⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 251.

This was not in the first edition of the Critique: Kant evidently felt the need to better explain the role of deduction in the formation of judgment qua objective. He also explains how his definition of judgment is no more consistent with the old maxim of the logicians: a judgment is «the representation of a relation between two concepts»⁸⁶. One of the explicit reasons for the refusal of this definition is the impossibility to account for non-categorical judgments (namely hypothetical and disjunctive ones). We can see how moving objectivity from a given relation between objects to a relation that springs from the laws of association as present in our unity of apperception creates the possibility for a personal access to objectivity itself and to an objectivity internal to our transcendental Ego.

In ‘The Analytic of Principles’ Kant describes general logic and its correspondence with the faculties of cognition, then he moves to transcendental logic, which cannot adhere to the same rules if it has to deal with a priori cognitions. Nevertheless, he explains, we still need judgments, since «the power of judgment is the faculty of subsuming under rules, i.e. of determining whether something stands under a given rule (*casus datae legis*) or not.»⁸⁷ While transcendental analytic is only concerned with the rules of thought and the validity of logical connections, this definition of judgment clarifies that, once given a value idea (whether it is ‘good’, ‘honest’ or any other similar definition of worthiness), we can judge whether something stands in according to that rule, despite the fact that such a rule is not

⁸⁶ Kant, *ibidem*.

⁸⁷ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 268.

found as such in reality, but stated by us. It is indeed an unusual form of hypothetical judgment, where it is not the content of the judgment to be hypothetical but the rule under which this content must be subsumed. Nonetheless, we can once again state that our faculty of judging presents itself to us as necessarily 'worthy', since it defines its own criteria of judgment and would be then senseless for it to self-judge itself as 'wrong'. Since our appropriation of a content, in Inheritance, is conceivable as a prolonged judgment of the content, there is no doubt, as said above, that we will judge our Inheritance as a "proper" or "correct" appropriation of the content.

Beside the self-reflective judgment on one's own process of inheritance (which as we have seen is always a judgment of worthiness and correctness), value-judgment can intervene at a content-level as well. In particular, *originality* is a crucial notion in our experience of Inheritance. Originality is here intended as the correspondence between the document and its content, with the latter being authored by the same thinker that authored the former. Without it, we tend to look elsewhere for the "source" of our inheritance, and to construct the narrative of our inheriting as dependent upon *another* text than the one we have interpreted. It is the case with textbooks, secondary sources and in general in all the occurrences of an interpreted text referring to a content originating *elsewhere*, and consequently in a "before" that is problematically collocated when seen in a relation with the now-then chronological dynamic of inheritance.

This discloses the problem of a meta-inheritance, i.e. of a content inherited not via its interpretation, but through the interpretation of a previous interpretation of it. This has typically been subsumed into the notion of tradition: when the interpreter is seen as simply a member of a historical group, and thus as a *moment* in a larger history of interpretations, the meta-inheritance is resolved and reassorbed without distinguishing itself from any other instance of reception.

Nonetheless, if we stay true to the inquiry into the individual dimension of reception that we have been pursuing, this constitutes a problematic case: on the one hand, the content-interpretation seems to become a mediated process, losing the primacy that we have discovered and the fundamental individuality of the process: the interpretation of the *original* content is not carried out by the inheritor, but by some else in his stead.

We must here identify three actors, and not only two as in our usual pair inheritor (who interprets/reads, etc.) and inheritee (the creator of the content to be inherited). The figure of the inheritee is here split between an **inheritee proper** (of whom the inheritor wants to inherit the creation) and a '**mediator**', who is in turn an inheritee insofar as his content (his interpretation of the inheritee proper) is received by the **inheritor**, but he is not recognized and interacted with as such. The inheritor remains susceptible of being transformed by the content, which he identifies not with the intellectual production of the mediator (the author of the document accessed) but as an inheritable content uttered by the original inheritee (the thinker to whom the inheritor is referring); the content, in the narrative

constructed by the inheritor, happens to have been inherited by the **mediator** (the interpreter of the content of inheritee proper) and is now presented to him as well as a potential inheritance. Therefore, if the inheritor believes (and narrates) himself to be inheriting the content *as* the inheritee (proper) created it, he will remember his process of inheritance as referring to the inheritee (proper), and the mediator will be relegated to a tool (and not rise to the role of alternative inheritee in place of the inheritee proper).

Inheritance presents itself as a process dealing always with the original content. No matter the historically defined source of the *document*, it is the content that we make the object of our inheritance, and the *then* of the inheritee is always that of inheritee proper (or at least of who we perceive as such: the one whom we believe to be the author of the content). If we perceive ourselves receiving something from the mediator, it is always in terms of new formulations, and thus of a mediated-content (by the mediator) which is different from the original-content (by the inheritee) discussed.

It is a matter of subjective identification, and not of an historical 'objective' analysis: the inheritor, always dominated by the tautologies we have explored ('this is interesting to me' and 'my inheritance is correct since I believe myself to be right') is not in the condition to distinguish a case in which the mediated-content is a modification of the original-content from a case in which the original-content is simply "retold" by the mediator. If we believe that any interpretation involves modification, we would say that this is never the case, but even if we believe in the

possibility of “reporting/referring” without modifying the content, the self-perception of the inheritor as inheritor of original content is unmodified, since its validation lies in the subjective process of inheritance, and not in an external objective “verifiability”.

Even the historical awareness advocated by Gadamer cannot avoid deluding itself with a notion of the originality of its documents. The document intended in its historically determined form is considered “true”: while the truth-judgment is moved from the content to the document, the fact remains that any access to a document and/or content is determined by our situation, thus making impossible any direct access to the content *as it was* when it was created.

The difference, before interpretation, is one of relevance. The content - at the moment of its creation - was one-of-many, in the sense that new contents are produced at any given time, and the ones that we choose to access are, again, some amongst many possible ones, even if we limit ourselves to content having the same chronological origin; but the content is also one-of-many contents present in a situation and more specifically in a thought-system, that of the inheritee (which constitutes his potential Legacy, but was, at the time of the content’s creation, part of his situation). Not only the inheritor could have chosen a different content (with a different author-inheritee), but the content was one of many even amongst those received, created and transmitted by the inheritee.

In regards to both aspects, our selection and our extrapolation of the content from our cultural density prevent the content from appearing “purely” as it was

conceived. However, once again, the transformative value of inheritance is in the act of accessing the content as it *is*, and to adjust one's own Inheritance accordingly. The nature of the content is relevant to the inheritor in the moment of choice about whether to welcome it in his system or to reject it systematically or whether to simply deem it irrelevant.

Refusal and irrelevance are not, indeed, equivalent to the process: while we have discussed how a content deemed irrelevant by the interpreter is unsuitable for retention by an individual inheritance, we have not yet analyzed the case of a *negative inheritance*. We have defined **inheritance as a transformative process of interpretation, which is carried out by an individual (immersed in a situation) on a content that was originated *before*, but that is of interest to him *now*, and is retained in his cultural system of thought (or his Inheritance, capitalized).**

With this in mind, we should now turn our attention to negative inheritances, i.e. the interpretation by the inheritor of a content with which he disagrees ethically or philosophically (that is, he finds it *bad* or simply *wrong*): can then an inheritance process begin, or is such a refusal a reason to stop? Can the non-correspondence of a content to our prejudice (intended in Gadamer's sense of a collection of judgments previously constructed, without the stigma conveyed by the expression) still contribute to the transformative process of inheritance? And to what degree is a negative inheritance relevant, compared to instances of inheritances where the content is welcomed into the fold of one's own philosophical system?

First of all, we shall point out that up to the moment of attention and the beginning of interpretation, there is not any difference between what we are now describing as a negative inheritance and any other one: it is not until the content is accessed and interpreted (extracted from cultural density) that we can express a judgment, and thus that we can consider the content *negatively* (as ethically unacceptable or philosophically/logically unsound). We are thus in a condition of interest, since attention has been turned and maintained – as attentiveness – for the time necessary for the interpretation to be performed. The content as accessed is not deemed irrelevant: attentiveness is maintained, and a judgment (a negative one) is carried out.

We must wonder what happens to this content. There are two situations that can occur. Either part of the content is salvageable/accepted or it is rejected in its entirety. What we define as the ‘entirety’ of a content (see also Ch. 1) is not necessarily the sum of all contents contained in a document, but the *perceived* completeness of a content that the interpreter sees as independent from other contents present in the same document or in a body of works by the same author. It is a matter of relative relevance⁸⁸: if the inheritor deems no other part of the content, the document and the (known by him) body of works by the inheritee to be relevant in the scope of his interpretation of this specific content, the content can be rejected in its entirety.

⁸⁸ As opposed to an absolute ‘irrelevance to me’ that - as we have seen - interrupts the process of inheritance, be it negative or one of appropriation.

Nonetheless, even in the first case (with the 'entirety of the content' rejected), this is far from leaving no trace in the inheritor's inheritance. Assuming that the original content was deemed relevant and then rejected, an opposite content (a content-N) negating the accessed content would be formed, either in writing (as it is the case of a formal refutation) or - most often - just as a intangible part of the accessed contents, interpreted contents and retained contents that constitute one's Inheritance. The content-N will then be not simply the memory of having read the original content with which the inheritor disagreed, but a product of the process of inheritance (=an inheritance) which will be retained as part of the Inheritance. Recalling the original content will automatically imply recalling it *as confuted* and thus recalling content-N.

We must not be mistaken, though, by imagining that - given that content-N was *not* part of the original document by the inheritee - what was retained is an original production of the inheritor and *thus* not a proper inheritance. What we have said, and needs to be stressed once again, is that in the very process of interpreting, deeming relevant, and retaining, new relations (and thus new complex ideas) are to be formed, and this is what distinguishes inheriting from repeating. The completely rejected original content, thus, has undergone a process of inheritance, and it is only by that process that it has been accessed-and-rejected (and not simply ignored or forgotten); moreover, it survives in the inheritance inside the complex idea content-N, which by necessity refers to it.

When only part of the content is rejected, the transformative process of inheritance (which transforms at the same time the single inheritance – intended as the content accessed – and the inheritor’s Inheritance) is different, but still active and transformative. The content to be rejected *partially* will then be fragmented in sub-contents of which only one or some of them will be deemed rebuttable. However, we must consider a] the fragmentability of contents into contents (see chapter 1 and the discussion of what a content is) and b] the preeminence of the interpreter’s discernment in determining what he is rejecting and his ability to construct the rejected part as a self-standing content (different from the original) for him to reject.

These sub-contents are parts of the original content and they would need to be re-presented as autonomous contents of which *some* need to be received: if the original content was not *entirely* rejected, some of its parts must be re-presented as valid content, while other parts must be rejected as invalid. Therefore, these sub-contents are dealt with as self standing contents, related by connections that are deemed at least partially wrong: otherwise, if they were to be considered (by the interpreter) in a status of co-dependence or of (correct) logical derivation, it would be impossible for the interpreter not to reject the ensemble of their connection (the original content we just see split into sub-contents) as incorrect as well.

In this case, the rejection of the invalid “part” would create a content-N as we explain above. However, even the other connected contents (the “parts”/sub-contents not considered invalid *per se*) would be modified to give account of their

new relation (one of contrast or at least of non-dependence) with said invalid content. From an original content which was accessed, therefore, the inheritor's Inheritance would now appropriate a content-N (the refutation of the invalid part/subcontent) as well as new contents generated by the valid sub-contents related to content-N by a new relation (no more one of co-dependence and agreement, if they need to be deemed salvageable).

All of this is independent from any discourse on the 'rightful' take on the subject matter. As Gadamer explains, hermeneutic is the manifestation of a «comprehensive life-phenomenon»⁸⁹ which while exerted on a subject matter is not about it, but about the 'we' of the interpreters (which in the process of inheritance has become an "I" when understood as individually extrapolated from the communality of tradition). Therefore, even where the content-N (or the refutation of the invalid sub-content and the reconstruction of the correlated ones) was to be incoherently constructed, this would be a matter for the interpreter *of* the inheritor's intellectual output (assuming such output becomes verbal), and would not prevent the new content from becoming a bona fide constituent of the inheritor's Inheritance.

Schlegel, at the beginning of the 19th century, writes that

«To understand someone one must be first cleverer than him, then just as clever and just as stupid. It is not enough to understand the actual

⁸⁹ Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem" (1966), in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 8

meaning of a confused work better than the author understood it. One must also be able to know, characterise and construct the principles of the confusion itself»⁹⁰

This statement, while quite lyrical (with its dealing with cleverness and stupidity in quite a non-systematic way) and lacking the theoretical underlying structure of a Schleiermacher, says nothing else than what we were saying above: in order for a negative inheritance to be constructed, the content/document/‘work’ that we want to contest needs to be understood at a deeper level than even its creator could, in order to bring to light the ‘principles of confusion’, i.e. the fallacies and the wrong connections between sub-contents/complex ideas.

Disagreement with the source, we have seen, has proved not to be a hindrance to the process of inheritance. Nonetheless, there are possible forms of ‘alienation’ that we can incur in our hermeneutical process; both are susceptible of preventing the content from becoming part of our Inheritance: Gadamer distinguishes

- a) an alienation due to our «*aesthetic consciousness*»⁹¹: we reject what has nothing to say *to us*. Gadamer is mainly referring to the idea of “Art for art’s sake”, which would alienate the spectator. This goes beyond the realm of art, and extends to any cultural construct: no

⁹⁰ Schlegel, *Schriften und Fragmente*, ed. Beheler, p 158.

⁹¹ Gadamer, “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem” (1966), in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 4

matter its scope, the relevance *to us* is determined by an objective status of subjectivity. I.e. there is no perspective for interpretation of this alienation beside the objective fact that the content did not meet our subjective interest. The alienation occurs when no communication with the content is possible. We have discussed irrelevance, but impossibility to comprehend the content would fall under this category, be it a linguistic problem (more on this later) or an impossibility of grasping the matter (for lack of instruments, knowledge of the field, etc.).

- b) The alienation of «historical consciousness»⁹²: the obsession with an objectivity of judgment and the (naïve) delusion of being able to completely bracket one's own historical situation leads to an historical science (with pretence to «no narration») which alienates our Inheritance substituting it with tradition. Once again, the dispossession of the inheritor's personal situation is intertwined with the preeminence of tradition and traditional authorities.

Gadamer explores these 'alienations' further; he is interested in discussing the experience of Art as an answer to the historical alienation. However, this is not, here, our main concern: we have set upon ourselves the task of analyzing inheritance as an interpretation of cultural contents and not from a strictly aesthetic

⁹² Ibidem, p. 5.

point of view. The relation between our situation, our Inheritance and our aesthetic taste would be an undoubtedly fascinating topic, but not one that is central to our description of the inheriting process.

Nonetheless, Gadamer touches on an extremely relevant point, which is the problem of language in interpretation. He explains⁹³ how we live in language, and thus any interpretation is subjected to the use of language. However, he notices how we are not “captives” of language:

While we live wholly within a language, the fact that we do so does not constitute linguistic relativism because there is absolutely no captivity within a language--not even within our native language. ...Any language in which we live is infinite in this sense [in that it opens us to the infinite realm of possible expression], and it is completely mistaken to infer that reason is fragmented because there are various languages. Just the opposite is the case. Precisely through our finitude, the particularity of our being, which is evident even in the variety of languages, the infinite dialogue is opened in the direction of the truth that we are.⁹⁴

We approach the content by means of language: Gadamer points out that «Language is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world»⁹⁵: consequently it is crucial not only to our interpretation of the content, but also to the establishment of our way to relate with our situation.

⁹³ Ibidem, p. 7-8

⁹⁴ Ibidem, p. 15.

⁹⁵ Ibidem, p. 3.

We will not discuss, here, whether language is inherited or inherent to our human nature: the topic is well debated and it would take more than a dissertation by itself. However, we must discuss how language can interfere or facilitate our process of inheritance, and focus on the influence of language on cultural transmission (and not viceversa). Insofar as our process of appropriating a text is concerned, we must distinguish four main cases:

- a) a case in which the inheritee authored a text in a language that we fully understand or that we perceive to fully understand; once again, considerations on the “right” understanding or the “full” appropriation of a text are external to the process of inheritance, and – while of historical interest – represent no issue for the inheritor convinced of being able to understand the text. In this case, everything we have said of inheritance retains its validity: the content is appropriated by the inheritor and possibly reproduced into another language, but still one that the inheritor masters (or believes himself to master). The transformative process happens on a level that is independent of language, at least from the standpoint of Inheritance. We will see how this is not necessarily the case from a perspective of Legacy.

Gadamer writes (following Schleiermacher) that «[the hermeneutic] understanding can be called ‘better’ insofar as the explicit – and hence worked out – understanding of a statement

involves a greater degree of knowledge of its actual contents. [...] A person who learns to understand a text in a foreign language will bring into explicit consciousness its grammatical rules⁹⁶ and literary forms which the author followed without noticing, because he lived in the language and in its means of artistic expressions.»⁹⁷ However, the difference in forms and language which can become apparent is not exclusively restricted to foreign languages: «The same thing is true of all production by artistic genius and its reception by others.»⁹⁸

We should not, therefore, conclude that the simple fact of the content being in a language that was learned *as* foreign implies a less-direct interaction with the text. Language is subjected to regional, chronological, social and class-related modifications, which contribute to make the language used in the *situation* by the inheritee inherently different from the one belonging to the inheritor. Assuming the latter knows the language, the foreign-ness

⁹⁶ Gadamer has here either a very restricted idea of how the non-native speaker interacts with a language he knows, or a very strict definition of what a 'foreign language' is. If our reader has any experience with foreign languages, he will know whether - once the language is learned - the emergence of grammatical forms as explicit become sporadic to say the least, or whether, as Gadamer believes, any text presents itself to explicit consciousness as an aggregation of grammatical forms.

⁹⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit. p 169-170.

⁹⁸ Gadamer, *ibidem*.

of it is only one of these factors, and we have no reason to believe that it has any sort of preeminence (as Gadamer concedes in the second sentence above).

- b) A case in which the content is completely inaccessible, since the language is *different* from those within the frame of reference of the inheritor. The content *as it is* (inscribed in *that* document or spoken by *that* voice) is inaccessible by the would-be inheritor. We have seen how this factually subtracts the content qua meaning from the cultural density of the potential inheritor; although it can still be present in potentiality as an artefact, accessible by means of aesthetic consciousness and even in terms of historical survey, it loses its accessibility as a text to be interpreted by means of reading/listening.

In this case, the foreign (or forgotten) language is not present *qua* language, and this is what was meant with the 'no captivity' instance in Gadamer's words: this language does not limit our possibility of interpretation (and potential inheritance) by virtue of its being a language, but precisely by its being a non-language, an object without the openness and dynamism which is disclosed by engaging a language as language, even when it is not our native one. In this case, however, we are held captive *outside* the language *by* our impossibility of entering the sphere of that

document in linguistic terms. The inheritance was never there in potentiality; its language and its content were not ours to access and potentially appropriate. The only access to the content, and before that the only way to bring it back into our cultural density, is through mediation [see d)].

- c) A case in which the content is obscure, because the language is not mastered by the inheritor or because the text is dense with terminology referring to a larger scope of knowledge unfamiliar to and not mastered by the inheritor. However, this case is only apparently distinct from the others: if we consider what we have so far understood about inheritance (which is a process of self-reflection initiated by the inheritor) we should realize that if the content is indeed accessed, the self-judgment of 'rightfulness' will intervene, therefore bringing this back to case a); the inheritor will judge himself competent *enough* to understand what he has understood.

Vice versa, parts of the document (and thus contents and sub-contents) he will possibly reject as incomprehensible; this either leads to a rejection of the content qua text [b)] or to the necessity of a mediation [d)]. In any of the three cases, this state of things is only apparent, or at least temporary, since the self-reflection of the inheritor will lead him necessarily to redefine this

hermeneutic situation into a different one, which would correspond to one of the other three cases, therefore extinguishing these hesitations.

- d) The fourth case is that in which the notion of inheritance risks becoming blurry and individual appropriation becomes stratified. It is the case of a (linguistic) content accessed in translation, either in writing or through the voice of the translator. It can also be the case of a content (even a non-textual one) 'explained' to the inheritor by someone else. In all of these instances, the content is mediated, and such mediation (a narration of the content, trying to be faithful but by necessity re-constructing it) creates an intermediate step in the chain inheritee-content-inheritor.

The duality of time remains unchanged: the 'now' of the inheritee (and thus of the origin of the content as potential) is still a 'before' for the inheritor, and the 'now' of the access is still marked by the moment of attention. The 'now' of the translator (when the translator has accessed the content) is either coincident (with oral translation) or pushed back into anonymity, since it is not addressed *in* and *by* the content, but only – possibly – beside the content, in an introduction, a footnote, a commentary. However, the content has been transformed by this mediation. The narrative - which was needed to make it present (and that we have seen as a part of the inheritance process) - has already begun: the content is reproduced by means of explanation and re-creation.

Is the explainer/translator a part of our inheritance? Are we inheriting his content or the original content? Who should we identify as the inheritee (the author) from whom we inherit the content? Once again, we should bracket out any historiographical concerns: what matters is the narrative, and the narrative is spoken by the inheritor, to himself before to any outsider. What he perceives as source of the inheritance remains the discriminating factor in the way he constructs his inheritance as stemming from a source (and not from the explainer/translator). The very existence of translation as a profitable tool (and as a surviving activity) resides on our ability to ignore it. We read the author's text *translated by* the translator. This is not true of all forms of reproductions: when we watch Kubrick's *Lolita* we are not watching (or we do not narrate ourselves as watching) Nabokov's narration. But when the medium stays the same (verbal to verbal, written to written) our narrative reconstructs the event-translation as the same as the event-creation: the translation is simply a way for the content to enter our cultural density in a more decisive way (compared to the simple notion of its existence).

Robert Frost famously said «I could define poetry this way: it is that which is lost out of both prose and verse in translation»⁹⁹, and this is an underlying theme of post-classical Western culture¹⁰⁰, even in medieval times, where the admiration for

⁹⁹ Brooks, Cleanth, Robert P. Warren, and Robert Frost. *Conversations on the Craft of Poetry*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ Arguably coming from the influence of Christianity and the problem of the *Word*, which was unknown to pre-Christian Rome, in which texts were translated without any stigma of

the *traditio* (and thus the repetition of the past) was paired with the fear that (in Dante's famous words)

Nothing harmonized by the laws of the Muses can be changed from its own tongue to another one without destroying all its sweetness and harmony.¹⁰¹

While both quotes certainly refer mainly to poetical pieces (of muses' inspiration and with poetry always involved), it is clear that everything that is not strictly technical (that is: instructional or descriptive) falls under this category of the 'not fully translatable'. Something is bound to be lost, insofar as the text had some value beyond the simple factual evidence contained in it: no one argues that data are not translatable. However, the possibility of the preservation of that *je ne sais quoi* - which Frost calls *poetry* and Dante *sweetness and harmony* - is not a concern for our analysis, since it lies on the side of the content as autonomous from our experience, a sort of cultural noumenon to be understood *as it really is*.

We will go back to the problem of contents' preservation in our discussion of Legacy (see ch. 4), but for the moment we should bracket this *content-per-se* and focus on the inheritor's reception of it. Going back to our analysis of four different

infidelity. Inspirational translation, the solution found by the translators of the Septuagint, is unavailable for lay works, and there begins the problem.

¹⁰¹ «E però sappia ciascuno che nulla cosa per legame musaico armonizzata si può della sua loquela in altra transmutare senza rompere tutta sua dolcezza ed armonia» *Convivio*, I.VII, 14. Hillard's translation.

cases in which the *foreign* text can be presented to us, when the content is accessed fully - as an interpretable possible inheritance – an interest has already been affirmed, and the content *as it is presented to the inheritor* is already accepted as the only content possible, the one the inheritor is actually dealing with. Translation does not constitute an obstacle to the process of inheritance, but simply a *fact* which is to be taken into account when trying to reconstruct such a process from an analytical, uninvolved point of view.

We have struggled to keep the inheritor, as a subject in the process of inheritance, as the focus of our exploration, resisting the temptation of derailing the discussion following ideas like ‘the *true* meaning of the content’ or ‘the content *in itself*’. We should nonetheless wonder what the role of the inheritee is (either as a participatory subject or as an object) in the process of inheritance. However, we must not yet embark upon the analysis of Legacy (i.e. of cultural transmission as the perpetuation of the inheritee’s system of thought) and remain solidly in the field of inheritance: the remaining questions we should ask should be asked in relation to the ‘now’ of the inheritor, not to the ‘now’ of the inheritee, which amount to the ‘then/before’ of the inheritor.

Roland Barthes, more than any other, has been dealing with the notion of the author (the ‘originator’ of the interpreted text) from a post-interpretational perspective. His position is summarized at the very beginning of what is arguably his more important work, *Death of the Author*: «Once an action is recounted, for intransitive ends, [...] this disjunction occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author

enters his own death.»¹⁰² Inspired by Mallarmé, he opposes to the «empire of the author» the “voice” of language, and claims that writing and the specular act of reading allow us to reach – via impersonality – the point where language acts alone. So far, so good: we have discussed already how - in the ‘now’ of content appropriation – the author can exist only as the voice of the text. Barthes points out that:

Once the Author is gone, the claim to “decipher” a text becomes quite useless. To give an Author to a text is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with final signification, to close the writing [...] Thus, literature - by refusing to assign to the text a “secret”: that is, an ultimate meaning – liberates an activity which we might call counter-theological, proper revolutionary.¹⁰³

The Author, therefore, is a placeholder for authority, which etymologically stems from the latin Auctor/Auctoritas (and can be understood as author-ity, as having the power to be author); to this Barthes opposes the liberating revolution of a literary approach. And what can this authority be, as a depository of the right ‘deciphering’, if not Tradition? The death of the Author-qua-author-ity is the liberation of the individual reader from tradition, but fails to reconcile the reader

¹⁰² Roland Barthes, ‘Death of the Author’ in *Aspen*, no. 5-6 (1967), p. 2.

¹⁰³ Barthes, ‘Death of the Author’, p. 5

with his own historical perspective, which was subtracted from him by Tradition, but needs to be re-appropriated in the wake of Tradition's demise.

Inheritance begins with interpretation *of the text* but does not end there. We cannot conceptually isolate the reader as an a-historical being who is faced with the content and with the content alone. Barthes' claim that the authors' absence (replaced by the Writer, the voice) displaces the book from temporality¹⁰⁴ cannot be true for the inheritor; the inheritor must be intended as a persistent subject, who undergoes the process of interpretation (or *that* process of inheritance) but survives it and integrates what he just read with (and within) his historical awareness, in order to appropriate the content and make it a part of his Inheritance. It is specifically in this recreation that the autonomous narrative of the inheritor can be exerted and bridge the gap with the time of the (dead) author, in a way that the simple disappearance of the latter could not be sufficient to explain.

The author disappears, but is the inheritee just the same as the author? Barthes clearly opposes the permanence of the author *qua* "person"¹⁰⁵, i.e. with a voice still present, autonomous from the document as written. The author as an object, pinpointing the originating moment of the content, and brought into presence only by force of the inheritor's hermeneutical action and historical reflection, can and must survive, as a constitutive part of what we have described as the inheritee. Inheriting a text involves narrating its history or, omitting to do so, to

¹⁰⁴ Barthes, 'Death of the Author', p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Barthes, 'Death of the Author', p. 2.

refuse the content a historical grounding. There cannot be a neutral failed recognition, the inheritor, so to speak, cannot be a simple spectator of the death of the Author-as-inheritee: he either narrates the history that ties himself to the inheritee (and by doing this contains Barthes' murderous instincts to the moment of interpretation of a single text) or, vice versa, destroys the historicity of the inheritee and his own historical awareness in the process.

The author is present to the inheritor as unequivocally "past", no matter how far in time the content was composed and even if the author is still alive and well. The historicisation of the content requires a "before" which is understood as a different period from the now of elaboration: as De Certeau explains, «breakage is [therefore] the postulate of interpretation and its object.»¹⁰⁶ A caesura must be conceived, for the inheritee to be identified as a source, on which the inheritance depends for its realization. The difference between the past and the present is precisely the fact that the content is perceived by the inheritor as self-standing, while the process of inheritance is dependent on the content itself. Despite the fact that the action lies with the inheritor, the passivity of the inheritee is a dominating position: the inheritor charges himself with receiving what the inheritance expresses, to appropriate its meaning.

De Certeau asks: «what is the historical significance of a doctrine within the totality of a period? According to what criteria can it be understood? How can it be

¹⁰⁶ Michel De Certeau. *The Writing of History*. New York, N.Y: Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 4.

explained in relation to terms advanced by the period under study?»¹⁰⁷ How can this interest for the *Zeitgeist* in which the content is originated be compatible with the death of the author? Are we condemned to choose between really appropriating the text and really understanding it? An *Heterogonie der Zwecke* prevents De Certeau from reconciling the two: in his effort to show how there is no 'teleology' in history (and no Spirit of Humanity marching together), he gets involved in a theory of history that risks identifying the author with its time, and make a document a necessary production of the *situation* in which it was composed.

However, the solution can and must come from the same concern, and it is once again a matter of narrative (or 'narrativization', in De Certeau's words); writing (or speaking) of the work of a past thinker places «a 'population of the dead' on stage»¹⁰⁸: the concern with the *Zeitgeist* of the past is not resolved via accumulation of data (thus constructing a criterion against which the historiographical work should be tested) but by the narrative 'staging' operated by the inheritor, who is led necessarily to recount the inheritee, on whom the inheritance depends. The «problem facing historians: what can we apprehend from the discourse of an absent being?»¹⁰⁹ is solved by making the absent present. This is an act of destruction as much as one of creation; «a certain destructive force [is] active in this passion for the

¹⁰⁷ De Certeau, *Writing History*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁸ De Certeau, *Writing History*, p. 85.

¹⁰⁹ De Certeau, *Writing History*, p. 244.

past, so characteristic of heirs and latecomers»¹¹⁰, writes Arendt: in creating the inheritee as author of *what he inherits*, the inheritor destroys the hovering ghost of the 'historical' personality. In this sense, the perfect inheritor, freed from the alienations of historical objectivity that we have discussed with Gadamer, would be no different from Jean Paul's *Cheerful Little Schoolmaster Maria Wutz*, who created his own library by writing *manu sua* all the books he had read *about*¹¹¹. No personality but also no authorial figure are left, the writer-author is present only *as* inherited. Identity is only narrated (and not 'objectively' identified): the original *Zeitgeist* of *time of the author* is not an object of interest per se, but only insofar as it is relevant for the inheritor's interpretation.

The connection between inheritance and identity (and creation of identity) does not end with the deconstruction of the author's identity (and its resurgence as inheritee); we inherit our identity before we can construct one. It all starts with a name, unique inheritance and primary moment of identification. The name is certainly a cultural content (and a textual one, since it is written and spoken), which belongs, at first, to the cultural density of the parents. The name is not immediately appropriable by the baby, to whom it *means* nothing at first. It belongs to the

¹¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, 'Introduction' to Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt, *Illuminations*, p. 39.

¹¹¹ Jean Paul, *The Life of the Cheerful Little Schoolmaster Maria Wutz*, referenced by Walter Benjamin in 'Unpacking My Library' in Arendt and Benjamin, *Illuminations*, pp. 61ff.

accessibility of the parents,¹¹² although they are at the same time turning their attention to it (as a name to be chosen) and creating it (as the specific name of a specific child). It is not part of their Inheritance, since they do not appropriate it: it is not *their* identity.

From the standpoint of the child, the name comes before Inheritance - since it comes with language (that we have seen being a prerequisite for inheritance) - and defines it. It is however, not properly an inheritance, since it is unreflective and un-interpreted: interest is not affirmed, but imposed. Imposing a name (not only to a child¹¹³) is giving identity, is handing down something that was never fully owned by the giver. The name is an inheritance without an inheritee and without a proper inheritor. 'Living up to the name' is a moral choice, and not a cultural one.

Nonetheless, the name of the inheritee is crucial to the recognition of the inheritance, both by the inheritor and by the *situation* he is immersed in. Acknowledging inheritance means recognizing the burden of the name and make

¹¹² Names are usually chosen from an existing pool, no matter how "out there" they may appear to be. The increasingly common choice of giving untraditional names (or names that do not belong to the baby's 'Culture' - be it defined by family or by country) does not change the fact that they are in the availability of the parents, and thus in their cultural density. The (extremely rare) case of a newly created name would deserve a separate analysis (as a moment of aesthetic *and* civic creation), for which this dissertation is not the place.

¹¹³ 'You shall be called' is a recurring sentence in the bible: imposing names to adults ("Israel" in Gen 32:28 or "Cephas/Peter" in John 1:42) is a transformative process, it means bestowing upon them an identity that is at the same time an inheritance *and* a legacy (since it implies the new name will be known).

the identity represented by that name, as well, part of one's Inheritance, alongside with the content. It is not the name of the person, but the name of that Author that we had killed in the process of inheritance. Acknowledging inheritance resurrects the author as historically significant and historically collocated (and vice versa, as we shall see, denying an inheritance kills the author once again); this collocation of the content into a historical environment (which the name of the inheritee summarizes) is not for the benefit of the inheritor: he has already historicized – or neglected to do so – the content when, after interpretation, he has understood it against the background of his own historical awareness.

The acknowledgment of the inheritee (and of his name) is part of a larger, more public narrative: the inheritor answers to the question *who are you?* implicit in the relation with the *they* of *sensus communis* that we have described in chapter 1. And the answer of the philosopher, of the historian, of the conscious inheritor is not only their own name, but also the name of the inheritees for whom they believe themselves to be carrying the torch. It is not simply a return into the welcoming fold of *tradition* as comforting scheme: the very fact of declaring one's intellectual ancestors is a claim to autonomy, since they may or may not be the Authors of the Tradition, and they certainly are not simply author-itatively received.

The claim to the name is a claim to a role, the role of heir – as legitimate inheritor. While being an inheritor is personal, 'heir' implies recognition. It reverses the relation to tradition: it is not a claim to a tradition (which does not necessarily involve appropriation) but the establishment of oneself *as* gate to a Legacy.

Depending on the notion of authority bestowed upon the inheritee by society, this may mean to claim the role of gatekeeper to a given tradition or to propose an alternative access to the wisdom of the past based on one's own interpretation and not on the hermeneutic process proposed by others (individuals or institutions). Recognizing inheritees involves substituting oneself to them as an access to the contents, implying that the content is re-proposed and re-presented in a way that is filtered by a deeper understanding or at least by the status of the inheritor/heir as present in the *situation* which he shares with his contemporaries.

The underlying narrative of Western civilization tells us that appropriation involves denial *and* later recognition: Oedipus¹¹⁴ finds out Laius was his father only after killing him; by killing him (and fulfilling the prophecy) he *makes* him his father, since the father *is* the one who he shall kill.¹¹⁵ Sophocles portrays the mode of our relation with the past author: by killing him in Barthes' sense, by removing him as an author, we can claim inheritance and power over the content, and establish ourselves as heirs. It is precisely by this appropriation and by the elimination of the author as an historically established *person* that we establish the writer of the inherited content as an inheritee, at the same time creating and receiving a

¹¹⁴ Cf. Sophocles, and Theodore H. Banks. *Three Theban Plays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

¹¹⁵ On the matter of Oedipus' *making* of fatherhood, Judith Butler commented splendidly in her Roger Henkle Memorial Lecture "Fallible Recognition: The Politics of Kinship in the *Bacchae*".

Legacy¹¹⁶: the father is killed to become such, and by the act of killing he is at the same time discovered as and made into his role of father.

Naming the content as author-ed comes only after interpretation, as we have seen. At the same time, though, inheritance names the inheritor only after having appropriated the content, and having historicized it as coming from a temporal 'elsewhere'. What then should we make of those cases in which the inheritor rejects the name? What of those cases in which the name is and remains unknown, or simply unspoken?

Denying an inheritance is not the same as narrating a negative inheritance: we should not confuse the rejection of a content as wrong (which as we have seen does not prevent the content from initiating an inheritance process) with the self-narration of a (potential) inheritor as non-heir, i.e. his refusal of being identified as participating in someone else's Legacy. The former lies in the realm of interpretation, and is constituted as inheritance by its inscription, as a negative content, in the system of thought of the inheritor. The latter, on the other hand, happens post-interpretation, in a *public* narrative, which is unrelated to the content *per se*, and only deals with the inheritance as a process. If the former operates *on* the content, the latter is a projection of the inheritor *as* not-a-heir: while the two can run parallel (with the disagreement being held as the reason for rejecting the heir-status) they are not the same.

¹¹⁶ More on this in chapter 5.

The rejection of the heir-status (or denying an inheritance) is a reaction, thus the inheritor cannot initiate it: it is an answer to the voice of the *situation*, which accuses him of being a heir in a way that does not resonate with his own self-narrative (not only a condemning one, as we shall see). The reasons for the disowning of the inheritee (and the refusal to be constructed as his heir) can be manifold;

- a) the character of the inheritee can be a contested one (as in the case of Heidegger and his alleged National-socialist sympathies¹¹⁷), carrying the stigma of a political or social “guilt” which is consequently associated with his theories. The idea is that whoever approaches the content this inheritee authored without a distantiation is inevitably bound to be contaminated by whatever ideological germ is attributed to the author. This is not only true of situations where the content is related to the action that is criminalized,¹¹⁸ but infects the public perception of the legacy in whatever field this may be represented.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Cf. in particular Joshua Rothman, ‘Is Heidegger contaminated by Nazism?’ in *The New Yorker*, April 8th, 2014. Contamination is a precious word, as we shall see.

¹¹⁸ E.g. see K. Moe, *Should the Nazi Research Data be Cited?* Hasting Center Report, December, 1984, pp 5-7.

¹¹⁹ It is the case, to remain in our line of Nazi-related public condemnations, of Albert Speer’s architectural intuitions, which are largely ignored by architectural historiography.

- b) the content per se can be discredited *as presented* by that specific author, and proclaiming oneself as an heir could bring the same discredit upon the inheritor, no matter what re-elaboration the content may have undergone. The inheritor does have a choice, which is that of defending the content and the inheritee, and trying to show how both were misunderstood. A most striking example of this behavior, which I had the chance to study in detail, was the defense and recovery of Origen (and his theories on the Spirit) by the group of theologians later identified by the label of Ressourcement Theologians (or “Nouvelle Théologiens”). At the beginning of their work (in the ‘40s) Origen was seen as a extremely discussed theologian, borderline heretic, and their first presentation of his work was absolutely non-committal, dealing with it as a matter of historical fact in their edition of his work with Les Editions du Cerf. It is only with Danielou’s work *Origène* that a defense of the value of his work from a modern Christian standpoint is first attempted.¹²⁰ While the details of such a case study (quite unfamiliar to anyone unaccustomed to the debate

My (limited) knowledge of the matter comes from Sereny, Gitta. *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth*. New York: Knopf, 1995.

¹²⁰ Danielou, Jean. *Origène*, Paris, La table ronde, 1948.

around the *Humani Generis*) are not to be discussed in this circumstance, there are a few noteworthy elements:

- i. Re-introducing the author (and prospective inheritee) in the public discourse was deemed necessary *before* trying to advocate a reconsideration of his figure.
- ii. Previous readers of Origen (e.g. Brady) had been extremely cautious to distance themselves from an image of 'heir' to the Alexandrine thinker, limiting their appropriation of his contents to specific subsets of their analysis.
- iii. The label 'Origenist' (despite the vigorous defense of Danielou, DeLubac and Von Balthasar) remained a serious accusation well into the '50s, thus leading Nouvelle Theologie's defenders to fight it quite vigorously. That means that, even after the recognition of an intellectual inheritance by the protagonists of the movement, the narrative remained fragmented, with some of their supporters viewing the claims of inheritance as an external accusation. We should not be surprised by this dissonance between Ressourcement theologians and their supporters, if we consider how the narrative must be always understood as self-narrative, and thus how it is impossible to

completely share someone's claim (or denial of) inheritance moving from a different individual standpoint.

- c) Finally, a reason to deny (or simply not to mention) an inheritance, and thus narrate oneself as not-an-heir, can reside in the claim to genius, or at least to originality. We have said how, in reading a document, the interpreter tends to look (or believe to be looking) for the *original* content, thus distinguishing what is presented from what is re-presented. It is therefore possible that the inheritor, when presenting a content to the They - and thus projecting it in his situation and in the cultural density of those who share parts of this situation with him -, wishes to narrate himself as an original thinker and to underplay the role of the inheritee in the construction of his system of thought.

While all these cases constitute a concern in the perspective of Legacy (how we present our content to be received) and will thus be addressed again in the next chapter, case c) (denying an inheritance to avoid being considered a derivative thinker) introduces a dilemma which emerges from time to time in reflections about philosophy. Derrida voices such a concern when he explains how only «pure absence» discloses «the possibility of creative imagination.»¹²¹ It is a problem that cannot be easily dismissed: if inheritance always builds on something else, if it is

¹²¹ Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 24.

always relying on what was uttered by a voice of the past, how can it be creative? If we need “pure absence” to create, how can we live in the presence of the past?

If that was the case, we should advocate a philosophy of disinterest, one in which *care* was not the center of our approach to the world, since in caring, in being interested, something is already made present, and pure absence (if intended ontologically) already impossible. But such a disinterest, in turn, could not be creative at all, since it would be relegated into potentiality, without being susceptible of being actualized by a content to which to turn attention. Pure thought, therefore, could not exit an idealistic state of self-reflection, thus being intrinsically non-creative itself. Should we then suppose that no creation is possible if we are already immersed in a cultural density, which makes pure absence impossible and presents to us a manifold past?

Literature can provide an answer to the problem of imagination as strong (if not stronger) than philosophy's. Ralph Waldo Emerson, on the subject of creative imagination, writes that

The insight which expresses itself by what is called Imagination is a very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees, by sharing the path, or circuits of things through forms, and so making them translucent to others. The path of things is silent.¹²²

¹²² Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Poet*, in Emerson, Ralph W, and Larzer Ziff. *Selected Essays*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 215.

He seems to believe (and show us) how while absence is impossible, silence is what we are presented with by the world, which – no matter what the intellect sees (and hears, arguably) – is ready to be imagined (and narrated).

We must understand once again that what is created in the process of inheritance is not necessarily a new content, but a new inheritor reading the content(s): pure absence is impossible if understood absolutely, since we are Dasein and we are never not-in-the-world. Derrida is aware of our status of beings necessarily presented with interpretations. What he is advocating, therefore, must be understood not as a factual absence: the ‘pureness’ of the absence is not an ontological one but a gnoseological enterprise! «We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things»¹²³, and what is to be made absent is the imposing figure of the author as a source of traditional authority. *Substitution* is thus the norm of absence in historical structure: the narrative of the inheritor substitutes that of the inheritee, which is made absent as a narrator and represented as a part of the narration.¹²⁴

We have reached the end of our inquiry into inheritance considered as a self-standing phenomenon, although we will have to come back to it in terms of its specular relation with Legacy, in chapter 5. However, before delving into Legacy per se, it would be useful to recap some of the most important points of our exploration.

¹²³ Montaigne, quoted by Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, ch. 10.

¹²⁴ Derrida explains how the very notion of structure in history is based on the notion of substitution. See *Writing and Difference*, p. 280 ff.

Firstly, we have defined the limits and extensions of the word *inheritance* seeing how it can indicate a content, a process and a system of thought, depending on usage. We have clarified the relation between these three instances, showing how they all relate to the same moment of reception.

This has led us to the discussion of the timing of such reception, and we have exposed how subjective historical awareness, and not objective chronological time, is the discriminating factor in our perception of the historicity of the content (and of the event of its creation).

We have then explained how the time of inheritance is necessarily reducible to a 'now' which can be explained as both *objective*, *subjective* and related to an *epoch* (which is subjective, but stems from a subjectivity which is not that of the individual). We have then explained what philosophers have intended by 'epoch' and how this relates strictly to the problem of inheritance, which tends to be a mediation between the historical situation of the inheritor and that of the content (originated in *another* epoch).

The absolute individuality of the *situation* (contrasting the universality of the epochs) has provided the starting point for our analysis of the opposition between absolutely individual *inheritance* and the opposing concept of tradition. Following Foucault, we have seen how inheritance (and history) thrive in *discontinuity*, while tradition relies on homogeneous continuity. We have discussed, however, how discontinuity cannot give a full account of inheritance, which is dialectically involved in continuity and discontinuity at the same time, thus distinguishing itself both from

tradition and from what Foucault describes as a mature approach to historical interpretation.

Consequently, we have explored how the notion of truth (crucial to historical exploration) and that of righteousness/wisdom (which inspires tradition) lose their primacy in the process of inheritance, where interest and self-judgment take the center of the stage, guaranteeing a self-confirmation that is always true in the self-evaluation of the inheritor.

The problem of time, as theorized by Augustin, has proved a challenge for modern notion of history, but we have seen how inheritance (by its making present the past) works perfectly within the frame of the “threefold present” proposed by Augustine: by understanding the narrative dimension of inheritance, we have seen how the immediacy of attention and the extended time of historical awareness can be brought together in a narration that is told *now* but that ties together different times (the *then* and the *now*).

We have seen how the *narrative of inheritance* involves both remembering, recalling and forgetting, but how it is not exhausted by it, and how *interest* predates both memory and narrative, and constitutes the moving force behind inheritance; this has required us to deal with negative inheritances, seeing how perceived “falsehood” or “wrongfulness” of a given content cannot prevent a process of inheritance from beginning, given the interest of the inheritor for the subject matter.

The interest in originality has led us to address the problem of language and to discover how, no matter the epistemological concerns that theories of

interpretation may rise, inheritance is fully able to be performed in the presence of a difficult language (foreign or technical) and even when faced with translation, which does not constitute an obstacle to the self-presentation of the inheritor as accessing the 'true' original content.

This displacement of the notion of 'true' content from the core of the phenomenon required us to discuss theories on authoriality and to stress how the death of the author is performed and surpassed in the process of inheritance, with the three moments of de-authorising the document, recovering the historical *perceived* inheritee and naming him to complete the appropriation.

The problem of the name and of the recognition connected to naming one's inheritee has accompanied us in these last few pages, in which we have discussed the role of the heir as a public image of the inheritor and analysed some of the possible reactions of the inheritor to the burden of the heir-status. Finally, we have tackled the problem of creativity in Inheritance, given the presence of a past that may appear to destroy individual spaces of imagination.

We have established the inheritor as a narrator of his own cultural reception, which is aware of both his *situation* and of the historical narration to which he must answer. We have disclosed how being an inheritor and recognizing oneself as one (or better as a heir are not identical) and how narration of the content (and of its reception) takes precedence over any notion of objective 'verifiability' of the transmission.

The inheritor as narrator has consistently played the role of protagonist, and both his contemporaries and his inheritees have appeared only as objects of his initiative. What remains to be discussed, then, is the opposite perspective, i.e. that of the person who utters the words to be inherited. The distinction, is clear, is performative and situational, not ontological. Nonetheless, a reversal of perspective is necessary, if we want to approach Legacy as a phenomenon, and not as something constructed theoretically in order to explain Inheritance.

Chapter 4: Legacy.

Now that we have discussed how inheritance comes to presence as a transformative process, we must move on to explore the dimension of Legacy, and in particular the role of the 'inheritee' as a subject (and not just as an interlocutor for the inheritor). *Inheritee* is a term that we will continue to use, in this chapter as in the following ones. While our perspective will change, moving from a bracketed inheritance process to the corresponding bracketed legacy and then to a theory of passing as a moment of synthesis, switching to terms like *legacy-er*, although appropriate, would only be a cause of confusion, and would not serve the purpose of clarity. Nonetheless, the reader should understand clearly that *Inheritee* will be used to indicate the author of the legacy and should be understood as a simple identifier and not as a *descriptor* of his role, since implying inheritance would defy the very goal of this section, and defuse the bracketing.

Alternatives like *author* or *predecessor* would not solve the problem; the first would introduce a confusion between authors of contents as such (thus from a content perspective) and their role as creative minds immersed in a historical situation. The latter would once again refer to successors, thus incurring the same problems as *Inheritee* itself. *Legacy-er* would then be the most reasonable solution; yet, beside adding another technical neologism, it would require a specular creation to substitute *Inheritor*, in order to reflect the change of perspective as well. We will

then stick to Inheritor-Inheritee, but we must be clear that we are approaching their relation *ab ovo*, from a tabula rasa cleaned of the inheritor's perspective we just explored.

Moving into our analysis of Legacy, then, we should first of all, and in order to avoid confusion, go through a clarification of the term, analogously to and somehow mirroring what we did for Inheritance at the beginning of chapter 3. We should distinguish three usages of the term: 1) a content consigned to posterity, 2) one's Legacy as everything which is passed on, and 3) the process through which the latter is created.

A legacy is *something* left behind, passed on. We approach it from a cultural perspective, since culture and our agency in a cultural panorama remain the focus of our analysis. It is true that every object is susceptible of acquiring a cultural significance and, conversely, that a medium for the transmission of a cultural content in time may acquire some form of physicality: however, the two levels of legacy (the material, property-laws governed one vs the immaterial, content related one) are not identical and, while partially overlapping, they cannot be fungible for our discussion. By legacy, therefore, we indicate a cultural *content*¹ that is passed on, or at least that is made available to be received.

¹ We defined the concept of *content* in chapter 1, and we distinguished it both from *text* (which can be one, but can also contain one or many, and even be part of a larger content) and from *document* (which implies a physical object reproducible and destroyable) throughout chapter 2 and 3. See chapter 1 in particular for the limits of our idea of content, especially in terms of expandability and fragmentability.

We will see shortly how and if Legacy depends on reception to be identified as such; for the moment, it is enough to understand that with *a* legacy we identify a content that is no more one's own, but consigned to someone else, be it an actual inheritor, a potential receiver or simply the general anonymity of 'the public'. By saying that *something* (a given content) is *someone's legacy*, we mean that this content has been passed on (and arguably that it is still recognizable as having been created by that someone, but we will come back to this), or at least that it has been made available *to* others *by* that someone.

At the same time, we refer to someone's Legacy (capitalized) as the overall sum of contents (considered as coherently constructed) that a someone (the *inheritee* in our discussion) has passed on. Fragmentation (which is crucial to the content-legacy, since as we saw in chapter 2 it is an element of our individuation of contents) disappears in this notion of Legacy, which on the contrary derives its meaning from an idea of aggregation that we superimpose on the agglomerated series of contents produced by the individual inheritee. Legacy, in this instance, indicates the body of work, the totality of contents and any structured thought produced, written and uttered by the inheritee. At the same time, it can expand to include any symbolic act, or any act that is susceptible of being received as meaningful (i.e. someone's legacy can comprehend even non-textual contents).

Finally, legacy must be understood as a process, which starts with Legacy as aggregation of contents but is not statically exhausted by it. Legacy 'happens', and must be understood as a process stretching in time. We shall see how the process-

nature of legacy is fundamental to the very possibility of talking of a 'legacy' in retrospective. The transformative nature (which, as we have seen, is an attribute of the process of inheritance) is not self-evident in legacy, since the act of content creation is in a diachronic relation with the actualization of legacy (while inheritance and act of interpretation were in a synchronic relation), but we will see how the very perspective of a legacy shapes the work of an author.

Legacy cannot be momentary, since persistence in time is exactly what identifies it as Legacy: something that appears and is immediately forgotten is, intrinsically, incapable of becoming a legacy. However, the *time-frame* of a legacy is problematic to determine. There is certainly a *now* of creation, in which the content-legacy is in the present as created-right-now: the inheritee wrote the text, spoke the words, painted the picture or made the gesture at a determinate time, which was potentially witness-able as a moment bracketing out past and future. However, this simple *now* can only be the time of the creation of the content as such, and not of the content as legacy.

Legacy, indeed, must contemplate the possibility of a future. Therefore, the now of legacy (even at its creation) must be understood as a *now and not later*, disclosing a relation to the timeline that is not only chronological ('I performed the act' today, or in June, or in 2009) but also, and specifically, comparative ('He finished his first article when his first book was not yet/still/already being written'). The difference is only apparently subtle. While when listening or reading a content we begin a process of interpretation which is grounded in the now and, as we have seen

in chapter 3, we must resist the temptation of interpreting it in light of the 'dead author'; the paradigm is reversed when it comes to legacy. What we are uttering is never understood as present just now, provided that there is a listener, or that what we write is, by its very nature, *inscribed* on an object (the document) made to survive the instant. Fichte points out how the possibility of reception is always alive, no matter how trivial the situation, given the very possibility of being heard/read, and without a necessary intentionality:

Has any one, in the circle of a few friends perhaps, allowed an assertion to escape him, which it may be supposed he would not willingly see published to the world? In a week or two the printing press is at work to announce the remarkable fact to the world and to posterity [...] carefully investigating and inquiring whether the assertion was actually made or not, before whom was it made, what were the exact words employed, and under what conditions the offender may be dismissed.²

Fichte is partially ironic, and certainly not everyone experiences the same exposure he did³. Nonetheless, beneath the hyperbole and the comical exaggeration we see something more profound, which deals with the impossibility to distinguish, upon utterance, what can be legacy and what can not. We should come back to this

² Fichte, Johann G, and William Smith. *The Characteristics of the Present Age*. London: John Chapman, 1847, Lecture 6, p. 33.

³ Which would probably be welcome to any scholar (and would certainly be useful to any young academic), but even then it would create a problem of how the contents are represented.

quote and this problem (what is legacy-able and who determines legacy), but for now we should focus on the notion of permanence, which as Fichte shows can permeate any cultural production, no matter how small.

Permanence, not presence, is the dimension of time that belongs most properly to legacy, especially in the age of record-ability in which we are immersed. It is not a matter of Bergson's *duration* as opposed to Bachelard's *instant*, since both could be attributed to the creation of (potential) legacy, and both risk preventing it from becoming a legacy.

The *instant* of creation is identifiable both as the conception of the content and as the beginning of the 'publicization' of the content, i.e. the first sentence uttered, the first page written, the opening of the curtains at the premiere, the first brushstroke, etc. Beginning and coming into being appear as 'instances of instants', so to speak, since we cannot escape the need for the moment of appearance. Bachelard explains: «within the realm of knowledge itself, there is indeed an original fault – that of having an origin; that of falling short of the glory of atemporal being.»⁴ The origin of the legacy, intended as chronological origin, and not as causal origin, is therefore an obstacle to the intrinsic claim of legacy to transcend the narrowness of the moment. Saying that legacy strives for permanence means saying that it tries to escape the momentary nature of its apparition, to prove Roupnel wrong when he writes that in our understanding of history «time is a solitude of the

⁴ Gaston Bachelard. *Intuition of the Instant*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013, p. 3.

instant»⁵: the instant of creation *of the content* cannot contain and restrain its emergence as a potential legacy. For the potential to be there, the content itself must be constructible as super-momentary.

At the same time, though, duration does not exhaust the time dimension of legacy, relating to its creation: the content appears as finite and transmissible, thus even the duration (of the time spent writing, of the conference paper's delivering, etc.) must disappear. The content escapes the moment but collapses duration into itself: when we conceive of the content, we think of a static object fixed in time (the time of creation), and the only time that survives in it is the length of reproducibility (i.e. the movie lasts two hours) which is, however, a measure of dimension more akin to the length of the book or the size of the painting than to a position in a time-line (where the duration/instant tension is made explicit).

Permanence of the object, therefore, is what constitutes the modal time of legacy; the content – lacking subject's agency - does not perceive a moment or a duration, yet it is imbued with both. Legacy is therefore, in Bachelard and Roupnel's terms, both an *act* and an *action*, or at least it must be understood as such if we want to account for its position in relation to the moment of its creation and its survival beyond it. Roupnel claims, quite lyrically, that «we are conscious only of the present» and that:

⁵ Gaston Roupnel, *Siloë*, Paris: Librairie Stock, 1927, p. 108. All Roupnel's translations are by Eileen Rizo-Patron.

The instant that has just fled from us is the same vast death that holds dominion over abolished worlds and extinguished firmaments. And the same fearsome unknown holds the approaching instant within the dark shadows of the future, as much as it does the Worlds and the Heavens that have yet no inkling of themselves.⁶

Bachelard, deciphering such obscure poetics, interprets this passage as a claim for the impossibility for us to conceive a duration that goes beyond the instant, and agrees with Roupnel only to a certain degree; yet Bachelard as well remains convinced - with regard to our experience of history - that «in the experience of a certain rupture of being [...] the idea of discontinuity imposes itself without dispute.»⁷ The possibility of legacy is not alienated by the notion of rupture per se⁸, since projecting the presence of the content created (at least potentially) beyond the instant is exactly what brings us to utter the content in the first place: duration may arguably not be immediately experienceable by our mind,⁹ but at least an idea of it must be present for the author to begin the creation process.

⁶ Roupnel, *Siloë*, ibidem.

⁷ Bachelard, *Intuition of the Instant*, p. 7.

⁸ We shall see later how it is exactly its power to bridge a gap in time that constitutes it as more precious than simple repetition.

⁹ This claim is at the core of Bachelard's book, which presents his arguments over 100 pages but still remains, in my humble opinion, not completely convincing. However, this is not the place for confirming or opposing this claim. We will then be satisfied to point out that some of his intuitions are absolutely precious and argue our opposing point (i.e. that the rupture does not prevent our legacy to project itself immediately beyond the instant) assuming for

Reducing this idea of permanence - as Bachelard seems to suggest¹⁰ - to the product of the work of historians fails to recognize that the notion of the survival of the content predates the question of who will receive the content (and thus the creation of a projected posterity of potential *inheritors*) which arises from our historical awareness insofar as we understand ourselves as historical beings with an historical future – and not just a biological one – in front of us. Before any concern for the passing on of the cultural content, we understand its survival in a primary, instinctive way, which relates to our perception of objects in the world (documents, sounds, receiving subjects).

The presence of the witnessing object (be it a person, a recorder, a blank page) and its recognition as a possible carrier of legacy are crucial to the creation of cultural contents: the language of the lone madman, who does not care whether he is heard or not, is not meant to create a content (although that can happen accidentally). Permanence is not a concern for the madman, as it is not for the mystic during the transcendent experience.

The madman who ‘talks to himself’ is not interested in the creation of cultural content: he speaks only the content that he wants to hear, and does not concern himself with the possibility for this content to be received. His discourse has no cultural content insofar as it is not meant to enter anyone’s cultural density:

the sake of discussion that he is right on the matter of the absolute «solitude of the instant» (Bachelard, *Intuition of the Instant*, p. 5).

¹⁰ Bachelard, *Intuition of the Instant*, ch. 2.

the words are dissolving into present, not meant to be carried into any kind of permanence. The cultural world of the madman is self-contained, the discourse relates only to the speaker and cannot survive its being spoken. Even when it is repeated and transmitted, it is arguably someone else who transmits what he picked up from the un-transmittable discourse of the madman. Permanence, in this case, is precisely the concern of the listener who believes it is her duty to make the blabbering survive the moment, and we would be hard pressed if we had to determine whether the content of the listener's report constitutes her legacy, or the madman's.

Michel De Certeau, when discussing the 'historicisation' of the mystical experience¹¹, rightly contrasts the attention for the exteriority of language (typical of the 'normalized' discourse) with the absolute interiority of the mystical discourse: the opposition of the world, in which presence and absence determine the reception of the word, is washed away in the «*absolute présent volitive*.»¹² Presence,¹³ not permanence, is the concern of those who speak without a cultural

¹¹ Michel De Certeau, *La Fable Mystique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1982, especially chapter 1 'Un Lieu pour se perdre' and chapter 2 (on language) 'Une topique'.

¹² De Certeau, *La Fable Mystique*, p. 231.

¹³ De Certeau writes (*La Fable Mystique*, p. 11) that the history of mysticism cannot be anything else than «une histoire de Manquant» (a history of the missing - one). However, once again, this absence is manifested (or un-manifested) to the external observer, the historian himself. And it is exactly the contrast between this external absence and the absolute (internal) presence of volition that makes impossible for the mystical experience to maintain permanence in legacy. Only the narrative of the mystique can be legacy-ed, not

and historical concern. If, as Angelus Silesius¹⁴ writes, «Gott spricht nur immer Ja»¹⁵ it is precisely to contrast a world where disappearance and opposition (the ‘no’s of time) are prevalent. God’s voice speaking to (or better ‘listened by’, from an epistemological perspective) the mystic contains its own permanence (the eternal ‘yes’ which affirms perennial presence).

Utterance of a cultural content, therefore, implies anticipation of meaning, and of retention of such meaning: not only does the author anticipate ‘making sense’, so to speak (be it a gnoseological or simply an aesthetical sense), but at the same time he also assumes that the content will be transmittable and that someone (not necessarily the receiving object, even when it is a live person) will be able to decipher that meaning. This is in some reciprocity with the reception theory’s take on interpretation: Gadamer explains how Heidegger’s ‘circle of hermeneutics’ finds «positive ontological significance» specifically in the realization that

A person who is trying to understand a text is always performing an act of projecting. He projects before himself a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the latter emerges only because he is reading the text with particular

the mysticism itself, and this absence ‘to history’ does not contrast the presence that we have defined as the concern of the mystic.

¹⁴ A 17th-century mystical theologian and poet. See Angelus, Silesius, and Paul Carus. *Angelus Silesius: A Selection from the Rhymes of a German Mystic*. Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Pub, 2007.

¹⁵ «God only says yes», Angelus Silesius, *Cherubinischer Wondersmann*, II, 4.

expectations in regard to a certain meaning. The working out of this fore-project, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there.¹⁶

Gadamer is talking about the interpretation-side of cultural transmission, and we have explored his insights when describing the phenomenon of inheritance (which is intertwined with and contains interpretation). However, in light of what we have said about permanence (and about the idea of the cultural content surviving the moment as necessary for the very creation of that content) it should appear clear how projection of meaning applies not only to the *understanding* of a text, but also (and first) to the creation of it *as a text* (or more in general as a content) *with a meaning*. And indeed it was Gadamer himself who wrote that «the intention and fulfillment of meaning belong essentially to the unity of meaning.»¹⁷

The inheritee is aware of the need for meaning, and fore-projects such a meaning not differently than the inheritor will later do. While the latter projects a yet-to-be-discovered (and thus future) meaning ‘retrospectively’, the projecting of

¹⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 232

¹⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 216. Gadamer is commenting on Husserl’s *Logical Intuitions* and in this passage (contrary to the longer quote above) he is not referring specifically to meaning of a text. However, the notion of meaning as a dialectic process with moments of creation, misunderstanding and interpretation works quite well with the unity of meaning that this quote suggests. Moreover, we could argue that if this applies to meaning *in general* it must apply to meaning in texts as well. We shall return to this unity of intention and fulfillment in chapter 5, when dealing with the moment of Passing and the codependence of Inheritance and Legacy.

the inheritee is completely *in the future*. The meaning projected by the interpreter is the meaning that she expects to found, understand and be provided with. It is a *past* meaning that she expects in *her own* future. Conversely, the inheritee expects the meaning her text is imbued with to be understandable somewhere in the future. The *present* of such meaning is the inheritee's own, and its 'making sense' is what is projected in the future. The expectation is reversed: the future is 'historical' and 'hermeneutical', while the present is absolutely personal.

Hope is at the base of this projection. Yet the inheritee does not project this meaning onto something else, but onto someone else: she hopes that the meaning – which she knows (or thinks she knows) experientially to be there - will be grasped at the moment of interpretation. She projects the possibility for it to be interpreted. Vice versa, in the inheritor's perspective, the possibility was taken as incontrovertible (belonging to the present of the interpreter), and it was the meaning itself that needed to be projected.

Therefore, the inheritee identifies herself as a harbinger of meaning, and understands the object of reception (be it the camera, the document, the listener, etc.) as a suitable receptor. In *S/Z*, a seminal text for poststructuralist theories of cultural reception, Barthes writes that «the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text,»¹⁸ and this applies to philosophical texts as well. The reader/inheritor (no matter how displaced in time) is called to cooperate in the construction of a meaning that is

¹⁸ Barthes, Roland, and Honoré de Balzac. *S/Z*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974, p. 4.

being conceived in advance, far before (conceptually if not also chronologically) she actually enters the scene. The text is produced as a text (and not as a dead object) only insofar as its intention is for it to be “readable” (*lisible* in Barthes’ original French)¹⁹.

The intentionality of discourse, as we have seen, shapes the delivery of content, but such intentionality is not necessarily an intention to produce a Legacy: as in Fichte’s example, the content may be uttered just for a few selected listeners, or it can be said ‘in passing’ and not with the aspiration of having it identified with the speaker as *their own*. However, it is hard to account for this intentionality staying in the framework of modern and post-modern theories of interpretation; not only have we seen how a large section of Hermeneutics has championed a bracketing of or at least a blindness to the personality and intention of the author (with the projected meaning taking precedence over the intended meaning), but even those who think we should take into account the person-author also risk confusing the author as received with the inheritee as a speaking subject. Recognizing our historical prejudices (freeing our possibility of historical

¹⁹ Barthes uses ‘*lisible*’ for the text intended only as a inscripted series of words written according to the rules of language and consequently capable of being read by an audience. *Scriptible* texts (usually translated as ‘writerly texts’) require an engagement from the reader (who is challenged by the reworking of established codes performed in them). The common denominator, nevertheless, remains ‘readability’, and in this sense we use here the term ‘*lisable*.’ Cf. S/Z (op. cit.) as well as Roland Barthes and Richard Miller, *The Pleasure of the Text*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.

awareness) is not enough, if we keep reaching the inheritee through the meaning of the text – a meaning that, as we saw, we are projecting.

If Hegel is right when writing that «all method is tied to the object itself»²⁰, then we cannot conceive a theory of Legacy which fails to recognize the object-legacy. But what is it? And how can we distinguish the single instance of *a* legacy (which is addressed by theory of interpretation) from the overall narrative of someone's Legacy (which is what is ultimately the goal of this second part of our exploration)? Even Gadamer, with his ambition to historicize the content by addressing the historicity of the author, defines his own efforts always in relation to the text he addresses: the author is functional to our understanding of the text, not vice versa.

Philosophical biographers, conversely, are usually interested in their character as a living being, with the underlying assumption, once again, that understanding the historical biography of a person will help us position him as an author, which in turn constitutes a tool for understanding a text. “Transversal” analyses as well ultimately fail at grasping the individuality of the inheritees, as they are usually carried out focusing on a specific facet of the Legacy (‘the role of *x* in the philosophy of *y*’) and therefore accessed and accessible only through a specific interest that, once again, cuts out the Legacy as a self-justifying entity.

We should not, however, confuse the moment of interpretation (when the content is addressed) with the overarching narrative of Legacy, which goes beyond

²⁰ Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, v. II., p. 486.

the text and deals with the respective position of the inheritee and of his heirs.

Gadamer is on point when he writes that

D'une part, tout texte appartient d'abord à l'ensemble des œuvres de l'auteur et ensuite à l'ensemble de la littérature dont il provient. De l'autre côté, si nous voulons saisir le texte dans l'authenticité de son sens original, il faut le voir comme la manifestation d'un moment créateur.²¹

We have stressed the importance of the moment of creation, and we must underline once again that the body of work of the author is something that is defined *ex post*, since it is not necessarily existing and certainly not collectively completed at the time in which every single content (every potential legacy) is created. Legacy is not experienceable directly by the inheritee, since it relies on inheritors receiving it.²² Nonetheless, the inheritee's Legacy is what we can access, since by recognizing an author as such and trying to understand him as historically collocated, we are actualizing his Legacy by creating our Inheritance, as we will see.

However, inheritees are often analysed through the methodological lenses of tradition, assuming a continuity between their Inheritance and their Legacy which is

²¹ «On the one hand, all texts belong first of all to the body of work of the author and then to the collective of the literature it comes from. On the other hand, if we want to grasp the text in the authenticity of its original meaning, we must see it as the manifestation of a creative moment» Gadamer, "Foundations for Hermeneutics" in *Problème de la Conscience Historique*, p. 75. Translation mine.

²² More on this in chapter 5.

taken for granted, but not verified. The fact that the inheritee and a potential inheritor belong to the same 'tradition' at large (be it that of a religious community, of a philosophical school, etc.) is charged with an essential, causal value where it should only carry a descriptive one; understanding someone's legacy in a certain way in light of the tradition she subscribed to may appear natural, but it is actually a multi-faceted logical bias.

First, we must assume that the inheritee was indeed a part of that tradition: as we saw, *claiming* a received inheritance is not the same as actually receiving it, and this is obviously true when asserting to belong to traditions as well; even assuming the good faith of the aspiring tradition-er (our hypothetical inheritee), there is no way to ascertain whether she was orthodoxically part of the tradition, or if she was diverging heretically from it. But even deferring the decision to the tradition's own authorities (the only ones empowered with decreeing or denying 'belonging') is not a solution; besides constituting an abandonment of individual, independent hermeneutics, it fails to provide an appropriate interpretational tool, since the transformation of 'truth into wisdom'²³ subtracts the transformed content from the domain of methodological analysis.

What we are told is just this: the author's work has content susceptible of being interpreted as part of a tradition. The interpretation *is* that the content is traditional. Therefore, using such an interpretation (by the authorities) as a tool for our hermeneutics of the content would constitute a vicious circle. Understanding

²³ Hannah Arendt, *Introduction* to Benjamin's *Illuminations*. Cf. Chapter 3, page X.

something in light of the tradition its author belonged to is a self-referential approach. Even the author's perception of himself as belonging to one tradition (or cultural group) has only an intention-value, which is however exhausted in his/her evaluation of such a tradition as philosophically (or ethically) solid, even assuming that this perception is sincere (and not claimed for socio-political reasons).

Beside the first assumption (that the inheritee belonged to a tradition and that this was shaping his intentionality while composing the content we are interested in), for tradition to be a valuable mode of interpretation when accessing a Legacy we would also have to assume that the tradition through whose lenses we analyze the inheritee's legacy is the same he subscribed to, and that we understand it in the same way. The illusion of 'a' tradition being constant is a prejudice derived of our historical situation. On the matter, Dilthey said that we would be in need of a «Critique of Historical Reason»²⁴ as a counterbalance to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, in order to deal specifically with our distorted perception of historical reality.

The use of tradition as 'context', therefore, actually needs to be contextualized in turn, creating a spiraling need for confirmation that reduces our interpretation 'in light of tradition' to an unsubstantiated claim or to a tautological (and thus useless) one. Beside the contrast between the individuality of authoriality and the institutional authority of tradition, this methodological filter prevents the

²⁴ Quoted by Gadamer in "Scope and Limits of the work of W. Dilthey" in *Le Problème de la conscience historique*, op. cit.

notion of tradition to be fully productive in our exploration of an individual's Legacy, even if we were to admit the value of tradition for such individual.

All that is left, therefore, when dealing with Legacy and tradition, is whether or not the inheritee was convinced to belong to a tradition. Even after resolving the problem of good faith that we referred above (when discussing the truth of the claim to tradition), all we retain is intention. We can ascertain the ambition of the inheritee to 'belong'. But that could never shed any light on the content of his Legacy *per se*, since it is *in* the content itself. What such intention can disclose, instead, is the scope of the inheritee's own Inheritance, from which Legacy necessarily stems.

We have reached a point of contact between Inheritance and Legacy, although inversely related and far less problematic than when considered in their more fundamental succession. If we have defined Inheritance as deriving from cultural density (in actualizing potential contents and retaining them), it is no surprise that we shall find Inheritance at the core of one's Legacy (which is the aggregation of all contents the inheritee is susceptible of handing down). We should not, however, underestimate three factors that influence the relation between one's Inheritance and one's Legacy:

- 1) We have seen how the interpretation and reception of a content as part of one's Inheritance are not simply an acknowledgment of a *factus brutus*, but a process of transformation. However, despite the condition of the inheritee being that of a human in society, who is necessarily immersed in a cultural density of potential, continually mutating and constantly

inherited potential contents, the role of individual speculation remains crucial to the progress of thought.

While it could be argued that, since no thought (philosophical or not) is born in a vacuum (the thinker being always already exposed to potential inheritances), the transformative process of Inheritance is what propels the thinking forward, there seems to be a certain absolute core of independent thinking that shapes the inheritance itself, in a process of self-narration. This, however, would be a topic for a different philosophical and psychological analysis; we will be content with saying that, whatever the answer to this question is, the very fact that different individuals, despite experiencing an overlap of a significant part of their cultural density, derive different consequences from the inheritances on a given matter, proves the relevance of one's subjectivity in connecting different instances of inheritance into a discourse. Therefore, simply equating one's Inheritance with their projected Legacy (which is potential for them and actualized from the perspective of the inquirer) would fail to account for the intervening personal speculation with its transformational power.

We have discussed in chapter 3 how language differences influence the inheritance process. However, for obvious reasons, the impact of language is far less relevant in the case of Legacy. The inheritee was an inheritor to others, and possibly accessed their contents through a

linguistic mediation (be it translation, her own understanding of the Other's language or a retelling of the content via accessible sources); her output, however, follows directly from her choices, to the point that her intention is transferred into her writing. The inheritee is by necessity able to understand what she produces, at least at the moment in which she is producing it.

A similar point can be argued for cultural and contingent limitations to understanding: we have discussed how historical awareness involves our understanding of the differences between the situation in which a content was created and our situation. Consequently, when we approach a content as interpreters (and possibly inheritors) we are called to avoid superimposing our situation on the content itself. However, when the content is received by the inheritee (qua interpreter and inheritor) and she proceeds to elaborate her philosophical system, the situation is by necessity and legitimately a factor. There is a caesura, therefore, between the subjectivity of the inheritee as interpreter and her subjectivity as creator of new Legacy, which prevents us once again from simply identifying the moment of Inheritance (in which a content originated by a different intent/subjectivity is received by ours) with the Legacy we are susceptible of handing down (in which a content is structured according to our own intent and thus created anew).

- 2) The inheritee qua inheritor is the recipient of a history that collapses into his situation, and cannot escape it. We are reminded by Ricoeur that:

Il n'y a une histoire que parce que les philosophies antérieures font partie de la mémoire et de la situation du nouveau philosophe; mais chacun englobe en quelque sorte l'histoire passée en lui, dans un moment historique qui est une sorte d'absolu.²⁵

The aspiration to escape present through permanence, which is the temporal mode lying at the core of the Legacy process, is completely absent in the moment of Inheritance, in which the nature of the situation is precisely that of including²⁶, at the *same time*, all of philosophical history. The transmission of the inheritee's inheritance into her Legacy cannot happen without a radical shift in perspective, and this shift must be reflected in our historiographical and philosophical approach to the transmission itself: the incommensurability of the collapsed *now* of Inheritance with the projecting *now* of Legacy prevent us from

²⁵ «There is a history only because previous philosophies are part of the memory and situation of the new philosopher; but every one includes somehow in themselves all of past history, in an historical moment that is somehow absolute.» Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, p. 63, the translation is mine.

²⁶ "Englober" in French is somewhere between 'including' and 'absorbing', 'making a part of the whole' and it is quite difficult to render in English, where 'englobe' refers more directly to a sphere.

understanding them as the same process, even when their performing subject is the same (i.e. the inheritee as inheritor of someone else's work).

- 3) If the experience of Inheritance is set in the diachrony between the moment of reception and the moment of creation (always *in absentia* for the inheritor), the appropriation of time is crucial to the self-narration of the speaker of a potential Legacy. Giving a speech and writing a page amounts to appropriating one's time and giving it away at the same time. It is appropriation in the sense that the speaker makes the time that of *her* speaking, the time in which *her* Legacy is uttered. The chronological time of the situation, on which she has no power, is shaped into the time of her Legacy (or of part of it).

At the same time, though, this time is spent giving the content to someone else, the time *of* the inheritee is given completely to Legacy itself, and this Legacy is given to the world. The appropriation took all the time, yet the time is given to the (potential) inheritor. Derrida reminds us of the clever sentence Madame de Maintenon wrote to Madame Brinon: «The King takes all my time. I give the rest to Saint Cyr (to whom I would like to give it all).»²⁷ Once again, the 'belonging' of time is a matter of narration. Narrating the content implies narrating one's time as one's own, but at the same time narrating the content to someone else means

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, "Time of the King", in *Given Time 1: Counterfeit Money*, ed. Peggy Kamuf, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 3.

making that someone else the center of this time, even if the spectator is displaced in a time that is yet to come.

The inheritor will read the book in a 'then' that is not yet present and yet makes the time of Creation a retrospective *then*: the Legacy *will have been* written 'then', and that 'then' is what the inheritee calls her 'now'. The appropriation implies a dispossession if it is to be a potential legacy, and such dispossession is not identifiable with the absolute appropriation of time in the moment of Inheritance.

The narration of Time, therefore, determines the temporal collocation of legacy in a way that the chronological time cannot fully sustain. De Certeau writes in *La Fable Mystique* that the «eternity of the moment» contradicts the «structured time» produced by history.²⁸ We must tarry and struggle with this intuition, which has a twofold meaning to say the least.

On the one hand, the «structured time» of history is a narration itself, if by 'history' we mean 'historiography', as we know De Certeau does in this work of his. In this sense, history tries to fit a series of absolutely incommensurable moments of creation in a structure common to all. It is the problem of history as tradition against which Foucault argued (in favor of discontinuity), which fails to account for the absolute individuality of moments of creation (and, we should say, of moments of attention as well). The narration of history *as* a history of continuity, therefore, proves incapable of narrating the eternity of the moment of creation, which could

²⁸ De Certeau, *La Fable Mystique*, Paris: Gallimard 1982, p. 21

only be understood as an absolutely momentary (and momentous) instance of legacy (with our narration of it being an absolutely individual inheritance).

De Certeau's insight, however, might as well be reversed: a 'structured time' is also that of the clock, which only knows rigid subdivisions (of time) that encapsulate any instance of creation, which is by necessity located in one specific point of the line of time. From this perspective, it is not narrated history to be structured, but the very nature of biological, geological, 'natural' time, with its seconds, years, life cycles, etc. In this paradigm, then, it is narration itself that is capable of providing an escape from the dry structure of time and into the absolute eternity of the moment.

The narration of cultural transmission, i.e. the narration of legacy and inheritance, opposes to the inevitability of chronological time a sympathetic moment, in which the creator and the receiver are narrated at the same time as inheritee and inheritor.²⁹ This sympathy is the 'friendship'-like quality that according to Ricoeur³⁰ allows the history-oriented philosopher to focus on a *particularity* (the eternal moment, in De Certeau's perspective) and to extract it from the sequence of the 'general process.'

However, while this 'symphilosophieren'³¹, this *élan vital* of sympathetic friendship, will be actualized only in the moment of Passing (the encounter of

²⁹ This is, *in nuce*, the essence of Passing, to which we shall go back in chapter 5.

³⁰ Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, pp. 48 ff.

³¹ Ricoeur, *ibidem*.

Legacy and Inheritance that actualizes both and requires both), it is in the moment of creation that the first narration-against-time is constructed; the mode of narration is the aspiration to permanence that we have discussed above, which takes contents from the situational dimension of the inheritee's own Inheritance and projects them into the eternalized (or at least eternalize-able) moment of creation of (potential) Legacy.

Creation of a content destined to posterity (no matter how delayed the perspective reception is supposed to be) necessarily involves a reflection on time, and a self-narration as creator in time. Art can sometimes be more explicit at that than philosophy. I recently found this snippet in a magazine, regarding an exposition by a fascinating (and recently passed) Japanese concept artist:

Time was the lifelong subject of On Kawara, the deep thinking Japanese artist, who lived in New York from 1965 until his death, in June, at the age of eighty-one. He is best known for his date paintings, collectively titled "Today", of which he produced thousands throughout his life. On each monochrome canvas, he hand-painted the date of the day it was made; if Kawara didn't finish a piece by midnight, it was abandoned. For years, he sent daily telegrams to friends and associates around the world that read, "I am still alive," and mailed postcards stamped with the time he woke up.³²

³² Andrea K. Scott, *New Yorker*, Nov 17 2014.

The article does not dwell upon the aesthetic criticisms usually connected to Kawara, and simply reports the 'bare facts'. Yet we are immediately made aware of how 'Time' (not 'date' or 'days', but time itself) was the subject of Kawara's bizarre date-painting. He produced a content in a specific time and identified such content with the moment in time itself in which the creation happened (to the point of trashing the document and the content if the span of creation came to be different from the narrated – painted –time); by doing so, Kawara caused the time of narration of the content to replace (or absorb, *englober*) narration and content, leaving only time as the only possible object-for-attention to be grasped.

What the New Yorker article leaves out is how this legacy of Kawara's, time as a content, is somehow the end result of a process that began with *Title* (1965), a tripartite painting on pink canvas bearing only a date (1965), a place (VIET-NAM) and an indication of materiality (ONE THING). Art Critic Anne Rorimer, arguing the self-referential nature of *Title*, writes that « "ONE THING" designates the painting's own reality as an object, while "1965" and "VIET-NAM" provide minimal political-historical context.»³³ We shall not debate the value of the paintings here, but understand how the intuition of time as Art (or of Art as time) symbolized by the Date Paintings passes precisely (and quite explicitly) through the renunciation of materiality and localization.

³³ Anne Rorimer. *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2001, p. 58. Also see her "The Date Paintings of On Kawara," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 17, no. 1 (1991): 120-37 and 179-80.

The disappearance (or the absence, since it is not on *Title* either) of the artist's signature seems at odds with our idea of legacy as a *personal* projection of permanence, but we are forcefully reminded that the time of creation was chosen by the creator: in writing the date, Kawara is narrating his 'today' as the (repeated) moment of his legacy, of which he appears to be very aware when we consider his 'I'm still alive' postcards, which re-constitute him as the creator of the narrated content and establish an indisputable legacy composed exactly of this time made content.

Jung-Ah Woo brilliantly notices that Kawara oscillates between a «cosmic dimension of time»³⁴ and a very menial day-to-day approach to his work. However, he also states that

despite the tightly regulated labor or, rather, because of such stringent organization, Kawara's daily activity is essentially meaningless, unlike production in a real workplace. His labor is meticulous but unproductive, as his actions actually produce nothing other than a series of almost identical canvases. The "rationalized time" on his canvas eliminates and ultimately abstracts the sense of epistemological duration. It is not a lived or experienced continuity of a subject, but rather a pure articulation of punctuality: "homogeneous, empty time." Kawara has marked the passage of each and every day on canvas, but such repetition only

³⁴ Jung-Ah Woo. "On Kawara's 'Date Paintings': Series of Horror and Boredom", *Art Journal*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (Fall 2010), p. 63.

diminishes the differences and abstracts the meaning of the idiosyncratic days.³⁵

What Woo fails to acknowledge is that 'epistemological duration' is not a requirement for a lived continuity of subject, since the subject is alive and kicking even in the absoluteness of the instant. The eternity of the moment appears 'homogenous and empty' only from the standpoint of the interpreter, and the impression of repetition is a byproduct of that 'structured time' of the (art) historian against which De Certeau had warned us. From the perspective of legacy, each moment (and each painting) is a self-contained meaningful instance of creation, which finds in its projection of a future receiver its justification, and posits the permanence of the artistic persona in a future independent from the survival of the artist as a person.

The artistic persona responsible for the collective work (*Date Paintings*) is the carrier of legacy. The On Kawara who is constantly 'still alive' in his postcards is what allows us to interpret his production as anything but 'meaningless': the projection of a unified Legacy is clearly at work in Kawara's work, and only bracketing our interpretational singular impression (of *a* painting or even only of the *Date Paintings* without the postcards and the evolution from *Title*) can we reveal *ex post* the value of Legacy which was crucial *ex ante* in Kawara's artistic aesthetic.

³⁵ Jung-Ah Woo. "On Kawara's 'Date Paintings'", p. 65.

Both Tradition and the Inheritee's inheritance have proved unsatisfying tools for the discussion of the inheritee's Legacy, and we have seen how even the single piece of inheritance can sometimes fail to portray its larger meaning as part of a Legacy. We are left, once again, with intention as the only discernible relation between the reality of the creating moment (the inheritee speaking or writing the content), the inheritee's predecessors (insofar as she possibly incorporates her Inheritance into her Legacy) and the projected unity of her legacy (to be received by her inheritors).

We saw how, in the case of Inheritance, any cultural content potentially accessible to the inheritor was susceptible of becoming part of her inheritance. This is not true of Legacy, since as we have shown reception of contents (and thus actualization of cultural density into interpretation and inheritance) is not sufficient to define and determine Legacy. Intentionality, and not cultural density, is the prime factor in the shaping of the horizon of Legacy. However, the intentionality of Legacy is not reducible to the intentionality of the inheritee, despite our immediate impression that would suggest as much.

Barthes appears very aware of the tension between the absolute presentness of the moment of creation and the subsequent collocation of the content into a larger narrative, although he fails to remain focused on the creation and falls into the trap of shifting to the perspective of the inheritor (and his interpretation of the content according to categories that belong to a *culture* at large):

The writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no consequent language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages.³⁶

Once again, self-narrative (the text is ‘ourselves writing’) is contained in the moment, but ‘superimposition of language’ comes right after. As soon as the content is consigned to the world, it becomes part of a ‘play’ that is out of the control of the creator. Once the creator becomes a potential inheritee (i.e. once her content becomes ‘public’) we see a reduction of her intentionality as self-narrated creator of *that* content, with its absolute freedom (‘plurality of entrances’ with an ‘infinity of languages’).

The very relevance of the content is absolute in the moment of creation, which as we saw discloses a complete appropriation of time – the time of ‘ourselves writing’ in Barthes’ words. As soon as the utterance is completed, however, even the very value of the projected meaning immediately escapes the control of the inheritee. «Has any one, in the circle of a few friends perhaps, allowed an assertion to escape him, which it may be supposed he would not willingly see published to the

³⁶ Barthes, Roland., and Honoré de Balzac. *S/Z*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1974, p. 5.

world?»), we just read Fichte³⁷ asking, and this is a perfect example of how the simple intentionality of the inheritee is not enough to fully determine Legacy: although the intention to create the uttered content must be there, it is beyond the inheritee's power to decide whether the content will enter her Legacy or be dispersed in the chatter of Heideggerian Idle Talk.³⁸

However, this is not enough to discount any value of the intention *to* Legacy in the formation of one's Legacy. As Kawara's example demonstrates, the overarching narrative of one's work is indeed a commentary on single instances of legacy whose aggregate is the body of work itself. What Fichte is saying is the opposite, i.e. that agreement with such narrative is not indispensable for the content to become a legitimate part of inheritance. The intention 'to be heard/read' is enough for the process of legacy to begin (although it remains in a state of potentiality until actualized by an inheritance).

³⁷ See footnote 2.

³⁸ Idle Talk that, by the way, resembles closely the 'Public Discourse' or 'Public Opinion' Fichte described in similar dismissive terms 120 years before Heidegger, although he does as much mainly in *Characteristics of the Present Age*, and not in the much more studied *Science of Knowledge*. While the word 'inauthentic' – so crucial to *Being and Time's* account of Idle Talk as the mode of being of the "They" – is admittedly absent, the idea is that Public Opinion is somehow opposed to the True Being of the Dasein, and to Truth in general. This interesting example of under-stressed legacy/inheritance would probably deserve a paper on its own, given that the only work that dedicates any structured discourse to this point is Gadamer's *Fichte.... Heidegger*, Hamburg: Fischer-Bücherei, 1970, currently not translated in English.

Nonetheless, the initiated legacy is susceptible of *reaction* from the public at large through the actions of individuals: while it is always a determinate number of subjects who will become *receivers* (be it simple interpreters or inheritors, depending on their retention of the contents) of a potential legacy, they are, from the perspective of the inheritee, embodiments of the public. The ambition, for Legacy, is to enter the public discourse and become disseminated through a multitude of cultural densities. The first step in this direction is recognition, both of the inheritee as a creative subject and of his work as a coherent body of contents (an aggregate). Foucault addresses the problem of recognition when dealing with what he calls the ‘thesis concerning a work’:

If an individual is not an author, what are we to make of those things he has written or said, left among his papers or communicated to others? Is this not properly a work? What, for instance, were Sade’s papers before he was consecrated as an author? Little more, perhaps, than rolls of paper on which he endlessly unravelled [sic] his fantasies while in prison.³⁹

Recognition of an authorial subject must come before the recognition of the content as connected, since the latter implies the former and depends on it: we are not only saying that those are connected, but also that they are connected by virtue

³⁹ Michel Foucault, “What is an author?” in *Language, Counter-memory, practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ed. And Trans. By D. F. Bouchard, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980, p. 118.

of their belonging, having belonged or just coming from a someone who is the originator of legacy, the inheritee. Foucault is coming from the perspective of a critique of literary criticism; therefore his focus is strictly on the literary and philosophical author. Moreover, in 1969 he appears to cling to an idea of 'the author' as a peculiar status of privileged creator, which is at odds with later developments in his *L'ordre du discours* (1971)⁴⁰ and especially in the lectures on *L'Hermeneutique du subject* (1981-82)⁴¹. Nonetheless, the notion of recognition is crucial to the process of legacy, and influences the very reception of any content.

A content whose author is 'unknown' or even 'unknowable'⁴² is still accessible, but its status as part of a Legacy is quite problematic (while its potential value as inheritance remains still very much the same). The recognition of legacy incorporates the recognition of a body of work from an author, and also identifies that author as a historical subject (and not, as it was the case in hermeneutics, simply as the author of the specific text we are reading). The problem of recognition and identification is once again one of narration, but we should try to distinguish the instance of an inheritee being recognized and named from the issue of an inheritor

⁴⁰ Cf. Foucault, Michel. *The Archeology of Knowledge and the discourse on language*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.

⁴¹ Cf. Foucault, Michel, Frédéric Gros, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège De France*, 1981-1982. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005.

⁴² The difference being whether he is unknown to the reader or whether his identity has been lost in the public discourse and only the text survives.

naming herself as a heir to the inheritee. While they appear to be two faces of the same coin, their epistemological origin is quite different.

When the inheritor narrates him/herself as such, the goal is twofold: on the one hand, narrating the content as *of someone else* historicizes it, bringing the inheritor's historical awareness to full development, as we saw in the analysis of inheritance. On the other hand, the status of heir to the inheritee (as a 'recognized' inheritor) can prove useful in order to participate of the legitimization the inheritee can indirectly bestow. This can happen even when the inheritee is still alive (and it is actually a widespread practice in academia). We said that from the standpoint of inheritance, the process is fulfilled even if the recognition as *heir* is never achieved. However, from the perspective of legacy, the possibility for the connection between the inheritee and the inheritor of being disowned (or simply not recognized by the public) is more problematic.

Since we have understood the potential for legacy as something that immediately leaves the instantaneous control of the creator, we must inquire what her denial of inheritance (as in 'denying that someone is her heir) can signify. Somehow, she appears to retain only a negative power, if any, but even this power only applies to the identity of the inheritor, and not to the content. Fichte explains how nothing is truly retractable, yet the history of Western civilization seems to attribute a destructive power to the *predecessor*; in Euripides' *Bacchae* Agave kills Pentheus *because* she does not recognize him: is unrecognizing the inheritor the same as destroying his/her status as heir?

Pentheus tore off
his headband, untying it from his head,
so wretched Agave would recognize him,
so she wouldn't kill him. Touching her cheek,
he cried out, "It's me, mother, Pentheus,
your child. You gave birth to me at home,
in Echion's house. Pity me, mother—
don't kill your child because I've made mistakes."
But Agave was foaming at the mouth,
eyes rolling in their sockets, her mind not set
on what she ought to think—she didn't listen—⁴³

Agave does not *recognize* Pentheus because he has changed his appearance and true nature (leaving aside legitimate concerns about socially imposed 'naturalization' of gender that are not explicit in Euripides' tragedy). To her, he is not her heir (although he factually is), and her failure to recognize him is enough to destroy his right to be, and to be her heir. While of course the destruction (physical or intellectual) of the person-inheritor is beyond the scope of the inheritee's power in the cultural discourse, disavowing one's inheritance as *not* the inheritee's legacy is certainly in the latter's reach.

Since the short monologue (or not-listened dialogue) by Pentheus does not question the legitimacy of killing per se, but focuses on the ancestor-descendant

⁴³ Euripides, *Bacchae*, lines 1115-1125. Translation by Ian Johnston.

relationship,⁴⁴ it discloses the space for a metaphorical commentary on the status of heirship and the need for recognition. Pentheus' claim not-to-be-killed is based on his knowledge that he is, indeed, originated by her *in* her house (metaphorically, the looming tradition to which they both subscribe). He appeals the 'capital sentence by disowning'. From his point of view, the 'mistakes' of his actions are not sufficient to condemn him not to death per se, but to the status of non-heir that would allow his death. These mistakes are failures in his duty (as a son) to respect the (apparently bizarre) passions of his mother. They are, these mistakes, inaccuracies in reception and fulfillment of the role of inheritor, who – Euripides makes Pentheus argue – can be such even without complete adherence to the inherited duty. I.e., a non-completely truthful inheritor can still be a heir.

However, the appeal to rationality fails: Agave does not need to offer a counterpoint, she simply «didn't listen». The ultimate power of disowning⁴⁵ is all that is left to the inheritee who cannot control her heir (and, being a tragedy, she can kill him for good measure, but that is beyond our point). Rejecting an heir does not cancel the mistakes and the misappropriated contents, but cancels the status of their inheritor. So to speak, legacy and inheritance are not properly modified by this refusal, only their identification for the public is changed.

⁴⁴ In this case a mother-to-son relation exemplifies it, but we could resort to Sophocles' Oedipus for a son-to-father murderous example.

⁴⁵ Curiously, 'disown' translates in most Romanic languages (*disconoscere*, *desconocer*, *désavouer*), as non-recognize, non-authorize, stressing moment of non-recognition (and refusal) over the loss of the right to belong.

The opposite does not lie in the power of the inheritee. The inheritee cannot claim as an heir someone that does not respond to the call, no matter how close her legacy and the inheritor's inheritance may be. Unwilled heir-status (as we saw) is bestowed by the public, and somehow the inheritee can only declare an 'intellectual theft' of sort: 'She stole my idea' replaces 'He is my heir', since recognizing the status of heir bears positive connotations from the point of view of the inheritee, who is thus unwilling to bestow heir-status on the ungrateful inheritor, to the point that the public discourse would receive such a claim as non-sensical.

At the same time, the inheritee cannot avoid any elaboration of her legacy that happens after she 'leaves the scene'. There is no foreseeing what will happen to one's historicized persona, and the inheritee (were she able to witness her own aftermath) could find herself associated with the most bizarre travelling companions. Samuel Butler's poetry gives a wonderful rendition of such possible future non-experience, although he depicts it under the most positive of lights:

«We shall not even know that we have met.
Yet we shall, and then part and meet again,
Where dead men meet, on lips of living men»

'Life after death'⁴⁶

The fleeting nature of future association ('part and meet again') underlines the absence of control over one's post-biological future. The 'lips of living men' are

⁴⁶ Samuel Butler, Sonnet XIV, 'Life after death', 1918

Fichte's Public Opinion, Vico's Common Sense, Heidegger's They, yet they lose here their gloomy colors and reverberate with possibilities. Connections we cannot make, intuitions our work cannot reach, can be available to our legacy by the actions and reflections of others, although these others are by necessity unknown to us, since they will be the living while we, as authors, will be part of the 'dead men meeting.'

Not only does the inheritee have limited control over the identity of the heirs (and such limited, negative control only extends to the range of her biological life) and no say in her post-mortem associations, but she even exercises limited power over the content of *her own* legacy. Foucault, once again:

Assuming that we are dealing with an author, is everything he wrote and said, everything he left behind, to be included in his work? This problem is both theoretical and practical. If we wish to publish the complete works of Nietzsche, for example, where do we draw the line? Certainly, everything must be published, but can we agree on what "everything" means? [...] Plainly, we lack a theory to encompass the questions generated by a work and the empirical activity of those who naively undertake the publication of the complete works of an author often suffer from the absence of this framework.⁴⁷

This resonates with Fichte's concern, although coming from the opposite direction: what is too insignificant to be considered and what content of importance

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, "What is an author?" in *Language, Counter-memory, practice.*, op. cit, p. 118-19.

risks to be lost in the shuffle, especially for a prolific author? Foucault is advocating a reflection on the value of legacy, although the rest of his article keeps falling back into a perspective strictly grounded in inheritance. He is aware of the limits of historiographical reception, and challenges the value of the simple, aggregative publication of 'complete works' (still so popular in his days and in ours) lacking a «theory to encompass the questions generated by a work».

The absence of the voice of the authors, the eclipse of the inheritees, is made evident precisely by those who try (in good faith) to make them present simply by re-presenting a mass of documents. Accepting the absence of the living voice (and understanding that only legacy remains) is the first step towards a legitimate historiography of culture. De Certeau notes that «L'historiographie est une manière contemporaine de pratiquer le deuil. Elle s'écrit à partir d'une absence et elle ne produit que des simulacres.»⁴⁸ It follows that we must let go of the idea that we can 'revive' an author (i.e. access his voice and historical situation) and move towards a re-evaluation of the simulacrum not as something false, but as a Legacy that is necessarily always already actualized in our Inheritance when we are approaching it.

While historiography certainly does not exhaust the range of possible approaches to our cultural past - and specifically the range of our forms of

⁴⁸ «Historiography is the contemporary way to practice mourning. It is written on the ground of an absence and does not produce but simulacra» Michel De Certeau, *La Fable Mystique*. Paris: Gallimard 1982, p. 21. The translation is mine.

relationship with a past author – De Certeau's point can be extended to our comprehension of our role in the history of cultural transmission and, in general, to our projection and foreseeing of the reception of our Legacy. Hoping for a lasting legacy is hoping to be (culturally) mourned for, and projecting permanence (of the uttered content) is projecting a presence specifically into the space of our own (inevitable) absence. The content must survive precisely our demise, and its remembrance is the cultural equivalent to the contemplation of the tomb: not all contents will become a world-known legacy, just like not every corpse is buried in a mausoleum, yet the comparison is strikingly suggestive even in cases of failed (i.e. never actualized) legacies. The forgotten content is equated to the forgotten tomb, and the ungenerous inheritors to the ungrateful child who deserts the dead.

The relevant difference is that the call to mourn, or the responsibility for failing to do so, is extended from the limited scope of kinship to the universal call of culture. Expanding one's cultural density creates a responsibility to mourn what is left out of our Inheritance. Having received *some* contents, we are mourning those inheritees and consigning the rest of them to (possible) eternal forgetfulness. Once again, this discloses the incommensurability of the historiographical concern from the legacy perspective and from the more immediate, and instinctive, perspective of inheritance. What we perceive as inclusive (our constant addition of contents to our cultural density and later to our Inheritance) is actually an instance of rejection of all other non-actualized legacies.

Our very identity as actors in a cultural panorama is predicated on recognition, and thus identification/identity. Therefore, writes Ricoeur, «personal identity can be articulated only in the temporal dimension of human existence.»⁴⁹ Simply put, instantaneous recognition from others is not enough to provide identity. Persistence of recognition is the origin of any claim to an identity that is socially constructed. The 'temporal dimension' is intertwined with our experience of identity, and just as primary. Legacy operates in parallel, since it relies on repeated instances of recognition and reception. Sameness (*idem*, *Gleichheit*, *mêmetê*) is what allows us to recognize selfhood (*ipse*, *Selbstheit*, *ipseité*), and it is realized on the base of continuity, of being the same one (*idem ipse*, so to speak) through time. Following Ricoeur we could argue that 'Character'⁵⁰ (and author-character in particular) is the point where the *ipse* and the *idem* become indiscernible. For us, concerned with Legacy, the inheritee must be constructed precisely as the conceptual tool that allows us to achieve recognition, identity and, consequently, permanence of legacy.

Considering that we have been heavily drawing from reception theory for the construction of our analysis of Inheritance and Legacy, we cannot ignore the apparently problematic position expressed by Gadamer in relation to what he terms 'the temporality of the aesthetic being'. He writes that «this contemporaneity and

⁴⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 114.

⁵⁰ Cf. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, op. cit., 5th study: Personal/Narrative identity.

present-ness of aesthetic being is called, in general, its timelessness.»⁵¹ What then should we make of cultural contents that are artistic in nature (and thus embody the aesthetic being that Gadamer has been describing)? We should not be tricked into thinking that such timelessness is in contrast with the notions of permanence as we expressed so far. We discovered how this permanence was expressed precisely in the projecting nature of the absolute moment of creation, and how the tension between momentariness and persistence was exactly the force behind the powerful effects of legacy. Once we read further into Gadamer, we find that he rejects a 'supra-historical' temporality⁵², and describes his theorized absence of temporality in dialectical terms. The lack of continuity in the creation of art is grounded exactly in the unrepeatability of the creative event, which can be only re-enacted, but never truly repeated.

The 'play' nature of the work of Art (which Gadamer believes perfectly symbolized by the festival) is precisely the uniqueness of the moment of creation that we have explored so far, when we have seen how the creative moment is not repeated in Legacy, but only remembered and re-created anew (in the Inheritance-s of the heirs). In his closing argument on the matter,⁵³ Gadamer characterizes 'trivial

⁵¹ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 92.

⁵² He attributes the origin of the concept of supra-historical temporality to Hans Sedlmayr, father of the *Strukturanalyse* and preeminent Art Historian. On the matter, see Sedlmayr, Hans. *Art in Crisis: The Lost Center*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2007.

⁵³ In *Play as the clue to ontological explanation [of Art]* (chapter 1, division II, part I of *Truth and Method*) Gadamer explores participation ('play') as the crucial element to our

objects of curiosity'⁵⁴ as incapable of engaging the 'spectator' (=potential inheritor), who is unable to turn his attention to these trivial contents (Gadamer writes that the spectator's attention remains focused on herself). The representation of these objects, contrary to the persistent contents of a legacy, lacks the «permanence of a claim,»⁵⁵ which is at the same time a condition and a reinforced effect of our recognition (of the content as valuable and of the moment of creation as generative).

Nonetheless, the aspiration to permanence, the hope to make "sense", and the claim to legacy are projected only potentially. We cannot guarantee, to use Gadamer's language, that our work will not prove to be 'trivial' and fail to engage the witnessing 'spectator' that it need to fulfill its intended destiny, i.e. become our legacy. The witness, the foreseen inheritor, is not simply a resonance chamber for our uttered, dead words. The inheritor is not just a receiver, we hope him or her to be first of all an understanding witness, able to offer testimony of our legacy, and not only repetition of words. We *expect* this from the inheritor – or an inheritor,

perception of art and culture in general, following (somehow naively) Schlegel, who, in *Gespräch über die Poesie*, had written «All the sacred games of Art are only remote imitations of the infinite play of the world, the eternally self-creating work of Art.» [Gadamer, p. 94] He derives from this that «play has its own essence, independent from the consciousness of those who play» [G., p. 92], which is an interesting intuition on the impersonality of the receivers of a content in the actualization of the content itself (as a Legacy). The notion that play obtains its representation through the players without depending on them is undeveloped, but we will come back to it when discussing the moment of passing.

⁵⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 111.

⁵⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 112.

some inheritor, since we do not know him or her or them, and it is precisely in this quality of unknown-ness, of absolute potentiality that the inheritor can satisfy our hope to make sense to the point that our speaking can make sense.

If we knew the inheritor(s) already, not a word would be uttered (or written, or something performed, etc.) that the totality of our inheritors could not make sense and use of. That is not the case, we speak hoping to be witnessed, and hoping that all of our words will prove to have a meaning disclosed by this yet-to-come inheritor (or the next). We speak with the hope that «someone who is able to think his way better through what an author is talking about will be able to see what the author says in the light of a truth that is still hidden from the author.»⁵⁶

We saw how the inheritor relied on the inheritee's creation to be already there in order for the process of Inheritance to be realized, yet now we are back to the inheritor as a necessity for the actualization of Legacy. The exploration we performed has disclosed a codependence of the two, which appears to clash with the chronological distance of their realization. We must then step beyond the limits of the bracketing we imposed at the beginning of this chapter (i.e. to restrain ourselves to the standpoint of the inheritee as subject) and try to address this codependence, and the moment in which both inheritance and legacy are generated.

⁵⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 172.

Chapter 5: The Moment of Passing and the impossible codependence of Inheritance and Legacy.

My goal for this last chapter is to summarize the connection between Inheritance and Legacy that I uncovered and discussed throughout my dissertation, and perform an analysis of the ‘moment of passing’ in which both are actualized. Given the emergence of a co-dependence of Inheritance and Legacy (with each relying on the actual presence of the other to achieve actuality), I will show how the moment of passing amounts to an impossible phenomenon, i.e. an unthinkable one. I plan to refer to modern phenomenological analyses of the ‘unconceivable’ to elaborate a model suitable for our description of this problematic, impossible moment.

Levinas’ Gaze as the (inconceivable) moment in which we meet the other will constitute the starting point of our description, although I will point out how the lingering ethical implications of this Levinassian actualization of the impossible are washed away in the case of the Moment of Passing, in which the emergence of the Other is enough to satisfy the call of the Other itself, given the diachronic nature of the meeting and the reduction of the call to a desire not to be ignored.

Following Derrida, we will expand the interior impossibility of the Levinassian encounter into an undecidability tout court, in front of which we are required to ‘think’ the unthinkable *as such*. However, it will be only through

Marion's notion of saturated phenomenon (as a phenomenon whose intuition exceeds our conceptual possibilities) that we will be able to perform the thought process that Derrida proposes.

After having established the philosophical mode of conceiving the inconceivable, I will give an account of the way in which we resolve this paradigmatic tension into a non-problematic life as part of a society and as immersed into our cultural density. Going back to Ricoeur, we will revert to narration, which we have seen as crucial to both the inheritee's and the inheritor's self-projection and to their conceptualization of the content as part of their Legacy and Inheritance respectively. I will discuss the possible congruence of narration with Gadamer's notion of play, which constitutes – in his work – the main access to the experience of art and to cultural contents in general.

We have described Inheritance in detail in chapter 3, making explicit its connection to our cultural density and its realization in the moment of attention, and explaining how it relies on the contents elaborated by minds that came *before*, which may or may not belong to someone else's Inheritance, but certainly belong to someone's Legacy. We have seen how Inheritance is a transformative process that springs from cultural density and historical awareness while modifying them constantly. The fundamental nature of Inheritance as a phenomenon that appears in the 'now' of the subject-inheritor but is dependent on a 'past' of the inheritee has led us to the analysis of Legacy, to which we have dedicated chapter 4. We have

analyzed hope and projection of meaning as principal motors of one's process of Legacy, and discovered that the supposed autonomy and primacy of the inheritee over their legacy is nothing else than an illusion, since the realization of Legacy resides squarely in the hands of future subjects – potential inheritors.

Potential inheritors, we say, because as we have seen the individual actualized inheritor has no power over the initiation of the process of Inheritance that actualizes Legacy, since his attention is directed to something that he has already encountered, that has already forced its way into his cultural density. While the two paradigms are efficient and satisfactory enough when looked at singularly (in a small phenomenological bracket, so to speak), when we revert to their analysis in the reality of history, re-inserting them in the line of time, and try to find the connection between these two phenomena so strictly related, things become more difficult. We should now discuss certain considerations that apply to the relation between the inheritor as propeller of Inheritance and the inheritee as proposer of Legacy and not, as we have done in the two last chapters, only to the situations in which only one of them was re-presented as subject of their own process.

If we consider that the series of '*now-s*', '*then-s*' and '*before-s*' that have emerged during our analysis of the modes of time of both Inheritance and Legacy are not objectively posed but intrinsically connected to the subjectivity of the performer of the process (be it Legacy or Inheritance), it will be clear that we must strive to analyze the relation between the two moving away from such one-directional considerations, while trying to preserve the absolutely individual nature

of the two. It will then be our duty to describe the interconnection of these two irreducible subjectivities, the one who creates trusting the foreseen witness and the one who enquires hoping for the conceived source of content. Without repeating the analysis of the two processes - which we have performed so far - we shall try, so to speak, to bring them together, in the effort to discover the nature, and the characteristics, of the phenomenon of inheriting-a-legacy¹ that was the starting point of our inquiry in the very beginning.

We must first of all enquire whether we have a starting point, in the realm of modern philosophy, to account for this relation. Philosophical Hermeneutics would provide some help. The usual way to look at the relation between the interpreter and the author, i.e. the past creator of the content and its future receiver, has been modeled after Schleiermacher's definition of it as a dialogue. While certain objections could (and shall) be raised to this perspective, it is a good place to start,

¹ 'Inheriting-a-legacy' seems once again to revert to a priority of the subject-inheritor, which would amount to the premature abandonment of our inquiry, although that also depends on our interchangeable usage of *inheritance/legacy* in common discourse (see beginning of chapter 3). The opposite, 'transmitting an inheritance' would suffer from a similar problem and risk eliminating the role of the inheritor if not that of *both* subjectivities. We shall then renounce, for the moment, an encompassing expression for the phenomenon that brings together the two phenomena, and be content with the reader being aware that the verb-value of 'inheriting' in the expression 'inheriting-a-legacy' is only an unfortunate incident of language, which prevents us to say 'inheritance-a-legacy' or 'legacy-an-inheritance'.

considering how it has explicitly informed the work of Reception Theorists², and, arguably, of modern phenomenologists. Schleiermacher's innovation, according to Gadamer, is that for him «what is to be understood is now not only the exact words and their objective meaning, but also the individuality of the speaker, that is, the author.»³ So far nothing new, and in agreement with what we have said about interpretation as an integral part of Inheritance. However, it is Schleiermacher's notion of *dialogue*⁴ as the hermeneutical mode par excellence that becomes precious when we want to account for the relation between inheritor and inheritee, legacy and inheritance.

Dialogue (German *Dialog*), as opposed to 'monologue' (*Monolog*) and even to dialectic (despite stemming from the same root), calls for the presence of two voices

² Gadamer shows the debt he feels toward Schleiermacher as the father of Philosophical Hermeneutics all through his works, since at least *Le problème de la conscience historique*. He addresses it even more explicitly in the historical section of *Truth and Method*, beginning with "Schleiermacher's project of universal hermeneutics" (p. 162 ff.). Ricoeur is even more explicit in a paper aptly titled "Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics" in which he states that «[while] it would be ridiculous to say that hermeneutics begins with Schleiermacher, [...] with him a specific problem does arise, that of understanding as such» and credits Schleiermacher with the discovery of «the specific character of hermeneutics» (Ricoeur, "Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics", in *The Monist*, vol. 60, n. 2 (1967), p. 181 and 182), i.e. the creation of a philosophy of hermeneutics/hermeneutical philosophy.

³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 164.

⁴ Cf. in particular Schleiermacher, Friedrich D. E., and Rudolf Odebrecht. *Friedrich Schleiermachers Dialektik*. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1942, p. 569ff.

in a relationship of «mutual stimulation of thought.»⁵ If “it takes two to tango”, so much more it “takes two” in order to dia-logue, to “speak in two” [voices]. Gadamer notices that «insofar as utterance is not merely an inner product of thought, but is also communication and has, as such, an external form, it is not simply the immediate manifestation of the thought, but presupposes reflection.»⁶ Communication happens from one to another, but reflected communication can only happen from one to another *and back*. Dialogue, speaking, involves a codependence. «Sorry, but more than one, it is always necessary to be more than one in order to speak, several voices are necessary for that»⁷, highlights Derrida, quite pleonastically⁸. If a dialogue goes both ways, then, and implies reflection on the (possible, potential) reaction, we cannot avoid applying this model to the moment of contact (both conceptual and chronological) between our inheritee-emanated legacy and our inheritor-performed inheritance.

⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 165. Gadamer extensively explores Schleiermacher’s notion of Hermeneutics (and its novelty compared to traditional, exegetical approaches) in detail, but never departs from this core notion of dialogue.

⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 166.

⁷ Derrida, “Sauf le nom”, in Derrida, Dutoit, *On the Name*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 35.

⁸ To be clear, by pointing out the pleonastic nature of Derrida’s comment I do not intend to diminish its value. On the contrary, when dealing with phenomena so deeply ingrained in our cultural construct, the self-evidence of certain statements becomes a resource, granting the philosopher (and us) a solid foundation upon which to build its discourse. We wish we were always so blessed, that we could find and trace our path from pleonasm to pleonasm, and only require an intellectual effort at the very end of our reflection.

As we mentioned throughout our analysis (and since the very beginning), I refer to this moment as the moment of Passing, and - before continuing with our dialogue-informed analysis - we should try to define how and why this terminological choice came to be, to avoid reducing it to another obscure neologism - something that we have tried to steer clear from, with the noticeable exception of 'inheritance'. Moment of Passing, then, is clearly a twofold expression, and we should analyze both its components. "Moment" refers more to a conceptual succession than to a chronological instant in time: while the creation of the content and the turning of attention are clearly situated in a chronology of factual events (although not necessarily easily determinable by either protagonists), the moment of passing is - as we shall see - impossible to pinpoint in time, being by its nature a liminal case.

Nonetheless, "moment" retains its value in two different senses: on the one hand, by equating the moment to a point on the line of time, we approximate to the impossibility of the time of such passing, with the metaphorical value of the 'point' (space-less, in geometry) prefiguring the impossibility of the moment. The moment qua point on the line is ungraspable, since it occupies no space. It is a less-than-instantaneous moment, one that never sparks to existence, as we will discuss in a few pages. At the same time, on a philosophical level, the sense of "moment" as a momentous event, as something that changes the status of things, in our case that

enables the actualization of both Legacy and Inheritance,⁹ is perfectly signified by this expression.

More vast and at the same time more precisely fitting is the meaning of “passing”, as a qualifier of this moment. The grammatical role of “of Passing” (which is just a qualifier indeed) should not divert our attention from the relevance of Passing itself, a term which could almost be presented alone if it had not already a philosophical relevance in the discussion of post-colonialism. Passing is a notion that is crucial to cultural transmission as it encapsulates the idea of handing *something* to *someone* else. Not only the content passes from the legacy into the inheritance (without, however, ever leaving the legacy), but agency as well passes conceptually from the inheritee creator to the inheritor interpreter.

Passing is at the same time a verb in the gerund form, a noun (‘the passing of the seasons’) and an expression of ethereality (‘mentioned in passing’), and this well reflects the multiplicity of meaning (and statuses as object, process, etc.) that we have explored for Legacy and Inheritance. Passing indicates a passing of time, and the Moment of Passing is a passing *of times*: from the timeframe of the inheritee (who saw a now of creation – that is already past – and foresaw a future of witness –

⁹ The etymology of *moment*, while not mysterious nor surprising, is fascinating. It stems from the Latin “*momentum*”, whose primary meaning is indeed “momentum” and not “moment”. This ambiguity carries into most European languages, and while it is unproblematically averted in physics it remains as a stumbling block for this kind of discussions in Italian (where *momento* translates both meanings, – inertia and instant – although with a reversed primacy of the time-factor, compared to Latin).

which is the moment of passing itself) to that of the inheritor (whose *now* of interpretation is *not earlier than* the moment of passing, where he met the *before* of the content and of the inheritee). Time passes from the moment of creation to the moment(s) of interpretation, but the moment of passing is a non-chronological moment, since it is at the intersection of two timeframes that are constructed by opposite reasoning: it is the end of the “before (I met)” of the inheritor and the beginning of the “then (I will be met)” of the inheritee.

Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* gets to the core of the temporality of a moment of meeting, although, being focused as he is on ‘the Gaze’ as a mode of encounter, he does not extend his analysis to the meeting *in absentia* that is the moment of passing as moment of the process of cultural transmission. Bergho beautifully summarizes this in her article on Levinas for the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

Levinas will not focus on time as the measure of movement, or even on time as Henri Bergson's “duration.” Duration denoted a temporality lacking all subjectivity [...] For Levinas, time will consist in two axes: (1) the flowing synthesis of now moments; (2) and a peculiar kind of interruption that Levinas will call the event of transcendence.

Transcendence is, above all, relational: it is a human affair. It is difficult to determine whether transcendence is an “event” *per se* or not. An event should be characterized as a force that introduces a decisive break into the historical *status quo* and redirects it in function of its own magnitude. The encounter with the other person, so far as it is an event, merely

inflects history or leaves a *trace* in it. [...] Transcendence in Levinas is lived and factual. How could transcendence be factual? While it has the temporality of an interruption that 'I' cannot represent to myself, transcendence nevertheless has a circular relationship with everyday life.¹⁰

We are brought back to the a-historical nature of the event-meeting, of the moment of passing. The "encounter with the other person" (although contumacious) is not a historical event: it belongs to the story of the inheritee and of the inheritor, and transcends our ability to quantify the fact. The *factus brutus* (to go back to Bloch) is not only irrelevant, but completely absent. The dialogue is an unconceivable dialogue, because it happens between two voices that never met, yet that rely on each other for the realization of their process of thought.

The impossibility of the dialogue starts with the impossibility to acknowledge the other by their name. The inheritee does not know her cultural inheritor, contrary to the dying person, who gets to nominate the heir to their physical property. The inheritee trusts that someone will 'get' something, as in 'receiving' just as much as in 'understanding'. What she passes on, what she commits to a possible witness, is passed on blindly, to a witness that may or may not be willing to step up.

¹⁰ Bergo, Bettina, "Emmanuel Levinas", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.),
<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/levinas/>>.

At the same time, the inheritor cannot name the inheritee before the dialogue has come to pass (!), since as we have seen naming is narrating, and implies having met, reflected and recognized. The process of inheritance is what names (or names not) the inheritee, what proposes to the word a substance to which the name is applied. If it is the result of the inheritance, the name cannot appear in the meeting that enables the inheritance, or if it were to appear, it would be an empty name, mentioned but not narrated. Therefore, this dialogue that is essential to both sides to enable the meeting of the Other is a dialogue in which one cannot address the interlocutor, because the interlocutor is an absolute unknown (and unknowable).

The impossibility of such a dialogue (or of the beginning of such a dialogue) extends to the content. How can it be a dialogue (from the inheritee's standpoint) if no one is (yet) there to answer? Yet the projection of meaning that we have explored in chapter 4 shows how the creator of content creates them specifically relying on this witness – this respond-er – that is yet to come. There is something messianic in the appearance of the inheritor, who comes to justify all of the legacy from which she draws her inheritances. At the same time, however, the inheritor looks at the past (both specifically and generally) as the source of knowledge, of thought, of contents that can provide validation to her own thought.

Derrida says about attributions that they consist of 'giving what one does not have to someone who does not want it'¹¹ and this fits perfectly the dialogue we are

¹¹ Derrida, "Response to Jean-Luc Marion", in Jean-Luc Marion, "In the name", in John D. Caputo, Michael J. Scanlon, *God, the Gift and Post-Modernism*, Bloomington and Indianapolis:

exploring. One cannot give one's legacy, not only because - as we have seen - one is never in control of it once it has come to exist, but most properly because what is received is always an inheritance, not a legacy. The content can be passed on, but the content as meant is not the content as received, so the inheritee cannot be the one giving it, it can only participate in the dialogue with the receiver (the inheritor) who does not know what she wants, since she does not know the result (her own inheritance) until the time when it has already emerged as a process.

This historical impossibility is not limited to the mode of dialogue. Even if we consider simply the logical possibility of Inheritance and Legacy as we have explored them, without enquiring about the *nature* of the moment of passing, we are met with a paradox: **for a Legacy to be actualized, we need one (or more) inheritors to inherit it, yet for the Inheritance to happen (to be actualized), an inheritee and his Legacy (or more than one) must already be actually present.**

This paradoxical tension lies at the heart of our experience of historical transmission, but it is lost in the shuffle of tradition and multiplicity: since we are always presented with a multiplicity of possible inheritances and infinite possibilities for our legacy, we can avoid focusing on the impossibility of the moment of passing. Tradition, with the anonymity of belonging, shields us from the problem, since it presents us with a continuity that is already there and tells us that succession of thought is easy, necessary, and natural. Yet this shields us only insofar

Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 43. Derrida is quoting Lacan (on the transfert) and referring this sentence to Marion's attribution of certain "objections" to Derrida himself.

as we refuse to interrogate the reasons and the modalities in which we adhere *personally* to a tradition, and to inquire why and how we receive certain contents (and not others) from a tradition that is by necessity accessed by us through our cultural density.

We shall not repeat here how Tradition is not sufficient for Inheritance and cancels the individuality of Legacy, but only reflect upon the reason for it, which we did not discover in our analyses of either phenomena singularly considered. Authority and authorial-ity are expressed in tradition always with regard to a whole of contents, avoiding facing the moment of passing in which one's Inheritance and someone else's Legacy are generated. Since we grow up in the fold of a tradition and of a culture¹² – always presented as an organic whole - the personal dimension of our cultural reception is hidden from our perspective, as it is our production: we speak and write *into* the public space, diverting our attention from the fact that someone in particular will be reading or hearing it.

The moment of passing, then, is absolutely personal and at the same time absolute absence. Hermeneutics and phenomenology alike have talked about the meeting between the past and the modern author in terms of friendship. Talking about translation, for example, Derrida writes:

¹² Even liminal cases are always represented in function of the overlapping space of two "cultures" with expressions like "Italian-American culture." This, far from being an opening to the idea of personal cultural density, is a reaffirmation of the paradigm of de-individualized cultural transmission.

Friendship and translation, then, and the experience of translation as friendship, that is what you seem to wish we were speaking about. It is true that one imagines with difficulty a translation, in the current sense of the term, whether it is competent or not, without some *philein*, without some love or friendship, without some “loveness” [*aimance*], as you would say, borne [*portée*] toward the thing, the text, or the other. Even if hatred can sharpen the vigilance [...] and motivate a demystifying interpretation, this hatred still reveals an intense form of desire, interest, indeed fascination.¹³

This core of *philein* and/or hatred is applicable without effort to any form of reception, of which translation is just one example – with the peculiarity of claiming to be as close to the original as possible. This meeting – any meeting with the Other – is already transcendental, if we stay true to phenomenology and to what we said with Levinas a couple of pages ago, and yet it is also personal acquaintance, a *friendship-quality* to go back to Ricoeur.¹⁴

This meeting happens on the basis of absence; the inheritee knows that «as soon as [she] speak[s], the words [she has] found (as soon as they are words) no longer belong to [her], are originally repeated.»¹⁵ This “as soon” is not a temporal one (since the words could be written or spoken in the void and only repeated, re-listened, re-read in a chronological future), but is the “in the beginning”, it means *at*

¹³ Derrida, “Sauf le Nom”, p. 47.

¹⁴ Ricoeur, *Histoire et Vérité*, p. 40. See also chapter 3.

¹⁵ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 177.

their core. Ἐν ἀρχῇ, ἧν ὁ λόγος, and the “as soon” is the *arché*, the principle upon which lies the very possibility for the words of the inheritee to be spoken.

The inheritee looks at the meeting with someone who is absent at the moment of creation, yet she knows that it will be in her own (the inheritee’s) absence that the meeting will take place. The inheritee as a person must disappear for the legacy to emerge in the meeting. She «must die away from [her] death in order to be reborn “immortal” at the eve of [her] birth»¹⁶, to return to Derrida. The presence of the inheritee at the moment of creation and in the immortality of Legacy is predicated upon her absence in the moment of passing. Therefore, even in the rare case of “direct” reception (i.e. the legacy/inheritance begins and ends with the disciple hearing the master), the possibility of the content to stay on its own, even in the face of the death of the utterer, is what is projected onto the moment of passing.

The inheritor as well predicates his own absence. If the meeting itself generates personal interpretation in light of one’s own historical awareness, the meeting must happen before personal interpretation is afoot. To inherit a legacy, the legacy must already be there *before*. So far we have explored and understood any instance of *before* from the exclusive perspective of the inheritor, and thus conceived this *before* as a strictly temporal one. However, this *before* is now disclosed first and foremost as a logical condition, which clashes with the necessity of the inheriting as a condition for the legacy to *be*. This fundamental yet simple

¹⁶ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 180.

obstacle escapes our everyday thought, since we are immersed in a cacophony of voices that we have already heard (or heard of) and we speak into a world full of potential listeners. But to think the moment of passing is to think the unthinkable.

This does not simply relate to the paradoxical nature of the moment of passing, but to the inconceivability of any of the two phenomena as detached from it. To think of a pure inheritance would be impossible, since the contents were approached *in a certain way*; the inheritor (being the inheritor ourselves, a thinker we use as an example or a detached hypothetical someone-else) must have read the content in a certain language (not necessarily the original one). He will have done as much at a certain time, in a certain situation, where the impact of certain words and topics will have been characterized in a certain way. Possibly even more important will have been the accessibility of the other contents that were part of the same legacies the read contents came from – which may or may not have been read by the inheritor. As soon as we apply the paradigm of Inheritance, and apply the insights we have obtained in chapter 3 to the particular contents that contribute to its formation, we are thrown into the moment of passing as already happened through the emergence of a Legacy – and then of a series of Legacies when we move from content to content while trying never to leave the Inheritance of our hypothetical subject (being the subject of the inheritance the subject of our analysis).

The same, however, holds true of Legacy, in an even more immediate sense. To discuss the particularity of a Legacy we must first have identified the inheritee, and thus performed a narration *about* the inheritee and about the contents that are

aggregated by recognition of *the name* of the inheritee himself or herself. Narrating the name means having established an identity, thus having collocated the inheritee in a historical situation that we define as theirs and not ours (no matter the chronological distance between the fact of their content-creation and the time of our thinking). As Marion acutely glosses, «not even saying the name would not suffice» to avoid attribution of qualities to the named, «since a simple denegation would still belong to predication, would again inscribe the name within the horizon.»¹⁷ We would be required not only not to name the inheritee, then, but to avoid narrating any identity we ascribe to them. But their identity is engrained in our having heard of them, since as we discussed in chapter 2 we cannot discuss the un-heard-of. To discuss the particularity of any one Legacy, we must have received it in our Inheritance, and thus have already “contaminated” this inconceivable Pure Legacy with the perspective of our situation and our inheritance of it. We cannot conceive any example of a legacy before we depict it as inherited *by us*.

¹⁷ Marion, “In the Name”, in John D. Caputo, Michael J. Scanlon, *God, the Gift and Post-Modernism*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 41-42. As it is often the case, Marion is dancing on the line separating theory of interpretation and continental philosophy (be it phenomenology or post-structuralism) from flat out theology. The ambiguity is exacerbated by the fact that in the context of this lecture he is dialoguing with Derrida. However, what they say about attributing qualities through naming to a purely transcendent being can be applied to the Other encountered in the moment of Passing, who is, in her Otherness, transcendent herself, at the very least until an interpretation is performed.

This inconceivability of pure examples of Legacy and Inheritance (taken singularly and theoretically abstracted from the commingling of the moment of passing) shares the inherent philosophical difficulties implicit in any exemplification, which are summarized by Derrida in *Passions*:

And certainly, when I say this very example, I already say something more and something else; I say something which goes beyond the *tode ti*, the this of the example. The example itself, as such, overflows its singularity as much as its identity. This is why there are no examples, while at the same time there are only examples; I have said this, too, often about many examples, no doubt. The exemplarity of the example is clearly never the exemplarity of the example.¹⁸

Choosing an example of legacy, therefore, already implies a surpassing of the immediateness of “this”¹⁹ instance, which is chosen amongst others and presented as similar to the others it exemplifies; at the same time, nonetheless, the exemplified (which should by its nature be same-as what it exemplifies) must be different from something else. And, when dealing with cultural examples, the paradigm of

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, “Passions”, in Derrida, Dutoit, *On the Name*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 19.

¹⁹ Aristotle’s *tode ti* constitutes a problematic translation issue and we shall not try to discuss it here. However, referring exclusively to the context of Derrida’s usage –and following many of his translators – we feel safe to equate it to the “this” of the English language.

difference – the object to which we compare our example – must by necessity come from our inheritance as well. It becomes, in itself, an example of what the first example differs from. This is what Derrida means when he says that there are no examples while at the same time there are only examples.

However, the impossibility of our supposed Inheritance and Legacy conceived on their own goes beyond the problematic of exemplification, as we have seen. They belong to each other in a way that clashes with the absolute Otherness of the Other and, most importantly, with their diachrony and relative displacement. We cannot, that is, conceive the inheritee as Other, but only as the Other encountered by us. This refers to the notion of Other that we encounter in Levinas, according to whom «the Other is inconceivable in the sense that “the Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign” to the I. Levinas says that the presence of the Other is infinite because it overflows rather than being “contained in” the boundaries of the non-moral domain of the I.»²⁰

Truth be told, the moment of passing retains certain characteristics that make it remarkably different from the Gaze (the moment of meeting-the-face in Levinas). The inheritee as such is encountered only after we have already encountered her Legacy, since we find her only *as* inheritee, and not as a morally challenging Other asking not to be killed. The only request is a demand not to be forgotten, which we are already obliging when we meet her. Compared to Levinas’

²⁰ Gutting, Gary. *Thinking the Impossible. French Philosophy since 1960*, Oxford: University Press, 2011, p. 122.

Other, the inheritee presents herself as a responsibility that *has already been fulfilled*. Here lies the reason for the independence of the Inheritance (even a negative one) from the moral judgment on the inheritee carried out by the inheritor that we explored in chapter 3.

Even when the moral or ethical evaluation of the historical person who acted, lived, wrote, and spoke were to be negative, this would not necessarily carry over into the judgment that the inheritor as such expresses on the Legacy, and on the singular contents that he comes to inherit. This is often the case in discussions about artists, since the call to inheritance is fulfilled by our reflection on the work of art, and any morality discussion comes after the fact. Think for example of the arrest of Roman Polansky, possibly the most internationally dividing case of this kind in recent times: even then, the value of his Legacy proper was never in discussion, while the moral judgment on his person (as a consequence of his act) was diverse (with remarkable differences on the two sides of the Atlantic). Art Critic Michael Kimmelman, writing for The New York Times,²¹ noticed this intrinsic difference between the artist (as inheritee, in our terminology) and the person, and addressed a perceived confusion of the two.

²¹ It is noticeable that only in time of peculiar crisis capable to ‘make the news’ similar issues reach the American mainstream media – and even then only in a middle pages column. At the same time, it emerges from Kimmelman’s words how ‘intellectual’ America (and not only specialists of ethics and philosophy) interrogates itself on these matters, if only in passing.

This goes beyond simply differentiating their work from their private lives. [...] Art and philosophy test boundaries. Artists demand their own social compass. Taken to its extreme, the argument implies that simply being an exceptional artist or intellectual can mitigate even criminal behavior.²²

The critic condemns the leeway granted to artists, but notices how this stems from the differentiation of their person from their intellectual production (and underlines in passing how this is true also in the case of philosophy). In receiving them as creators of (and through) artistic content, we risk confusing their legacy with their person, and imagine the police arresting the first instead of the second (which would be quite the surrealist short story). This, however, only strengthens our point; the moral responsibility we have when meeting the other face to face is not transported into the moment of passing: one could insult his readers (or at least be very caustic, à la Nietzsche), and still be read.

Nevertheless, even assuming that the contents themselves were to come under the fire of our moral judgment (in reading texts like *Mein Kampf* or, from a more conservative point of view, *La philosophie dans le boudoir*), this reaction (and

²² Michael Kimmelman, "The Polansky case: a Gallic shrug", in *The New York Times*, October 3rd, 2009. Kimmelman then goes on focusing on the differences between America and France: «The notion certainly didn't arise with Mr. Polanski. Americans democratize celebrity, then love to knock famous people off their pedestals. Any infraction will do. Not for the French. They lionize the physician writer Céline even though he disgraced himself as an anti-Semite. They idolize the vagabond writer Jean Genet not despite the fact that he was a criminal but, in part, because of it.» and more.

the memory of this reaction, and the intellectual consequences of both) would be inscribed in our Inheritance and disclose new areas of our cultural density. The other that speaks from the past is un-killable and incapable of killing us or others, and thus, if we apply a strict Levinassian perspective, incapable of challenging our morality.

We strayed into the discussion of morality and reception, and we must now go back to the reason for which we turned to Levinas, i.e. his statement that *any* encounter with the other is transcendent. We were and are still trying to find a philosophical approach that would allow us to conceive the moment of passing, which appears impossible and escapes our epistemological power, at least directly. The model of inconceivability (and invisibility) proposed by Levinas limits itself to the interiority of the person (the face defies 'the power of my power'²³), i.e. it is an impossibility to account for the Other based only on my internal faculties; instead, we are trying to conceive something that is externally impossible: firstly because it involves two subjectivities and it appears impossible from both reciprocal perspectives; secondly, because this impossibility strides with our intuition of legacies constantly flowing into inheritances.

²³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and infinity: an essay on exteriority*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969, p. 198. The original sentence, admittedly hard to translate, reads "*mon pouvoir de pouvoir*", which could also be made into "my power of being able to."

In dealing with impossibility (and specifically with the impossibility of the encounter) Derrida moves on a slightly different level than Levinas, since – as Gutting points out –

Derrida's undecideability is a more radical version of Levinas's unconceivability [sic] of the Other. Levinas's Other is inconceivable in terms of the concepts of interiority, but can, nonetheless, be understood through a phenomenological description of our encounter with him. Derrida's Other is inconceivable tout court and, in particular, is not accessible through a phenomenological description.²⁴

However, Derrida is still getting only to our impossibility to *constitute* the undecidable object as an object for our understanding. In discussing *Différance* (the «playing movement that 'produces' – by means of something that is not simply an activity» – our experiences), he argues that thinking of it is «uneasy and uncomfortable.»²⁵ His «talk of *différance* is a way of driving home the point that all positive concepts fail to be fulfilled when applied to the experience of the incomprehensible.»²⁶ The incomprehensible and the impossible, therefore, appear as such specifically insofar as they cannot be grasped positively and directly by our efforts at conceptualization. We are called to think the unthinkable, to contemplate

²⁴ Gary Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible. French Philosophy since 1960*, op. cit., p. 135.

²⁵ Derrida, "Différance", in *Margin of Philosophy*, tr. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 11-12.

²⁶ Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible*, p. 154.

that which we cannot see nor conceive directly, but which we intuit to be true because of our being immersed in its necessity.

A possible ulterior solution to our search for an understanding of the moment of passing can be offered by Marion's discussion of saturated phenomena. When discussing Husserl's phenomenology, Marion notices how it begins from «the inescapable duality of appearing and what appears» and how Husserl identifies two possible relations between the two. 1) «the intention finds itself confirmed [...] by the intuition» or 2) «the intention can exceed intuitive fulfillment [in which case] the phenomenon does not deliver objective knowledge». However, Marion distinguishes a third possibility in which «the intention (the concept or the signification) can never reach adequation with the intuition, not because the latter is lacking but because it exceeds what the concept can receive, expose and comprehend. This is what we have called the saturated phenomenon.»²⁷

Derrida agrees that while the inconceivable cannot be fully grasped, impossibility can be contemplated as «something in excess of knowledge» for which «thinking is not the right word.» (p. 60)²⁸ While Levinas, Derrida and Marion find this inconceivability in different places (in the encounter with the Other, in the Gift and in God respectively), their models constitute a precious instrument in thinking

²⁷ Marion, "In the Name", p. 39.

²⁸ Derrida and Marion, "On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion. Moderated by Richard Kearney", in John D. Caputo, Michael J. Scanlon, *God, the Gift and Post-Modernism*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999, pp. 54ff. Page numbers are given in parenthesis.

the impossibility of a phenomenon. Derrida summarizes it well by saying that what he is «interested in [...] is precisely this experience of *the* impossible, which would simply be a non-experience.» (p. 72) He is «looking for another possible experience of truth [...] with all these conditions of impossibility.» (p. 73)

He is, once again, dialoguing with Marion, and the latter proposes to speak of a «counter-experience [...] of bedazzlement, of astonishment or *Bewunderung*» and of «an event that we cannot comprehend but nevertheless we have to see» (p.75). And here we find, finally, the justification for our expanding the notion of saturated phenomena (and of contemplating the inconceivable wherever it should arise): Marion writes that this counter-experience is «the correct and consistent kind of experience appropriate to every decisive experience in our life – death, birth, love, poverty, illness, joy, pleasure and so on: [...] we see them but we know our inability to see them in a clear manner; and nevertheless, these impossible and unintelligible evidences play the most important role for us» (p. 75).

Gutting notes that

It should be clear that this [...] discussion concerns the very nature of the philosophical enterprise as a discourse about the conceptually impossible. In these terms, the question concerns the nature of our experience of the conceptually impossible and of the kind of philosophical discourse that expresses it. Both Derrida and Marion agree that the impossible is not [...] something we can directly grasp and locate exactly in our conceptual network.²⁹

²⁹ Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible*, p. 162.

What our exploration has uncovered is not the necessity of being able to think the impossible, to experience what overflows our concepts, since this had already been established by the phenomenologists to which we referred; rather, our discovery is that beside religious (in Marion), biological (Marion's off-note about birth and death) and ethical (Derrida following Levinas) counter-experiences of impossibility, we are presented with another phenomenon that transcends our possibility of description in our everyday cultural dimension: the moment of passing. This phenomenon is as impossible as the Gift or the meeting with the Other (and shares certain characteristics with both), yet it exhausts its ethical consequences in its very appearance onto the scene.

The lack of a possibility of conceptualization, however, does not imply that we should renounce speaking of Legacy AND Inheritance tout court, but just that we cannot conceive them separately, nor can we fully grasp the moment of passing as their simultaneous actualization. What is left, therefore, is the way in which we, as individuals in a cultural context, deal with the legacy-inheritance axis, i.e. narrative and narration. We have found that both inheritance and legacy rely on a narration that is carried out at different moments in time, but that is tasked with bringing together all the modes of understanding time that are collapsed into the two phenomena.

One of the approaches to the problem of narration is Gadamer's notion of 'play', which in his work assumes a status of 'presentation' of the work of art (largely conceived). He writes:

If we speak of play, this refers neither to the attitude nor even to the state of mind of the creator or of those enjoying the work of art, nor to the freedom of a subjectivity expressed in play, but to the mode of being of the work itself. [...] All those purposive relations which determine active and caring existence have not simply disappeared, but in a curious way acquire a different quality. The player himself knows that play is only play and exists in a world which is determined by the seriousness of purposes. [...] Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in his play.³⁰

Gadamer is here speaking about the 'work', which would equate to either Legacy or content in our analysis, depending on which of his sentences we choose to focus on. He writes that all *purposive relations* (i.e. the *projected meaning* that he discerns in interpretation and that we have found to be crucial to legacy as well) do not simply disappear and that they acquire a different quality. This 'play'/*Spiel* is purposefully vague and only described as «the to-and-fro movement which is not tied to any goal which would bring it to an end»³¹, although we are to understand it as at the juxtaposition of game-play, playing an instrument, theatrical playing and

³⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit., p. 91-92.

³¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 93.

even «its so-called transferred meanings [as...] the play of light, the play of waves, the play of [...] forces, even a play on words.»³²

The purpose of the play appears to be exhausted by its appearance 'on the stage,' just as we observed that the call of legacy is satisfied by inheritance and that inheritance self-justifies itself by being necessarily interesting to the inheritor. Can we then understand narration (the unifying mode of being of Legacy and Inheritance) as play in these terms? And can we defuse the problem we face when trying to grasp the moment of passing by contemplating legacy and inheritance as re-united as part of narration?

Ricoeur, who was earlier our main reference when discussing the role of narrative, explains in *Time and Narrative* that time «becomes human» only insofar as it is articulated through a «narrative mode» and, vice versa, that narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a «condition of temporal existence.»³³ I believe that in these terms we can construct narrative as the solution to bring back to 'humanity' (in this case intended as our epistemological horizon) the moment of passing whose temporal collocation has so far eluded us. The narration (of oneself as inheritee or inheritor respectively) happens in a space saturated with previous narrations and with potential interlocutors for our narrative. Therefore, the paradoxical tension created by the moment of passing is dispersed in our constant self-narration, which defuses the inconceivability of the moment by diluting it with the matter-of-fact

³² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 93.

³³ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, op. cit., p. 52.

contemplation of ourselves on the background of a trickle of inheritances and legacies.

Gadamer: «We say of someone that he plays with possibilities or with plans [...] He still has the freedom to decide one way or another, for one of the other possibility [... Yet] The attraction of the game, which it exercises on the players, lies in this risk. One enjoys a freedom of decision, which at the same time is endangered and irrevocably limited.»³⁴ The limitation of play, of the interplay between our subjectivity and the contents we face, can then become the scope of our cultural density, which presents us with possibilities that appear to us to be endless, since what lies outside the limits of accessibility is unknown. We have an illusion of absolute freedom (call it a freedom of attention or a freedom of inheritance) in our receiving attitude as well as in our ambition to Legacy (there are, after all, infinite potential inheritors), while our freedom is actually delimited by the accessibility of contents.

We enjoy this limited freedom and we participate in a Narration, which is shared and individual at the same time. On the one hand, we integrate in our narrative effort notions like Tradition, which as we have seen only has a tautological epistemic value. The force of the limit-notion of Tradition is the same as the value of Gadamer's play: Tradition is conceivable as a form of play where «the players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation through the

³⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 95.

players.»³⁵ In other words, the subjects of tradition are not the ones performing the narration, but the “wisdom” of tradition is made visible through the narrative *about* such subjects. On the other hand, we present ourselves as heirs to some currents of thought and authors of the past and originators of ideas to be received in the future. The narrative thus produced participates in the play insofar as it is a movement back and forth between our present, the past we inherit and the future onto which we project our legacy.

Narration is a form of individual repetition - since it is a way for us to acknowledge contents that have already existed in the past and since we rely on someone else to repeat our contents in the future. It is not, however, a repetition *qua* duplication, or a repetition of the *same*. In Deleuze’s terms, repetition (of a ‘movement’ in thought) «expresses at once a singularity opposed to the general, a universality opposed to the particular, a distinctive opposed to the ordinary, an instantaneity opposed to variation.»³⁶ This is the kind of narration we develop naturally by participating in the cultural discourse we are immersed in. The narrative that results, which is first and foremost a self-narrative, absorbs the absolute singularity and instantaneity of the moment of passing, but at the same time refers to the universality of its process. It is a productive repetition of content (and a production of contents to be repeated), and not a barren one.

³⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 92

³⁶ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 1994, p. 3.

This close relationship between Narrative, Cultural Transmission and Play has recently been addressed within Performance Studies by scholars who, veritable inheritors of the hermeneutical tradition, are interested in the relation between author and reader. Their perspective is slightly different from that of the philosophers we have insofar discussed, but it goes hand in hand with their intuitions; moreover it has the merit of trying to expand this reflection to fields not traditionally addressed by philosophical discussions (theater, rituals, etc.).

Drawing from Judith Butler and Roland Barthes, Schneider writes: «any citation indicates that, as utterances, the uttered might emanate from the reader as well as the citing writer.» She states that «one of the dilemmas posed by contemporary constructivism concerns the degree to which utterances, re-uttered, like rituals (re)enacted, become or undo one. That is, utterances bring one into subjecthood, even as, by virtue of citation and the necessary repetitions of language, utterances bring one out of an identity that could be called discretely or entirely ‘one’ or ‘mine’.»³⁷ Once again, repetition is a way to disclose a subjecthood that does not originate in the self-consciousness of a person, but in the interplay of the utterances, which are afloat in our cultural experience, and which can alienate ourselves from ‘our’ identity if we succumb to the temptation of ignoring the absolute individuality of the transmission.

³⁷Rebecca Schneider, “ ‘Judith Butler’ in My Hands.” In Armour, Ellen T., and Susan M. St. Ville. *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. 225-251.

Just like Ricoeur explained how narrative can solve the aporia of time disclosed by Augustine,³⁸ we must resort to narrative to solve the paradoxical contemplation of the impossible moment of passing, which we narrate always as already happened (since as we said before we always speak of the Legacy of someone as already received by us or someone else). Not only historiography, then, but the very possibility of a discourse about the past (even merely about a content that we did not think *ab nihilo*) must be understood as grounded upon our self-narrative as receivers of cultural transmission and transmitters of a cultural *quid*. Tradition is the pre-eminent model of this narrative, but as we have seen it is twice removed from the authenticity of the saturated phenomenon that is the moment of passing, since not only does it remove the inconceivability and singularity of the moment, but it also removes the subjectivity of the protagonists reducing them to objects of the play-narrative.

We must therefore remember Goethe, who –when discussing the relation between ourselves and our past – wrote that «[History is] the most absurd of all things, a web of nonsense for the higher thinker.»³⁹ Nonetheless, we are unavoidably caught into narrating and discussing history and our role in it, or at least its meaning for us. The web of nonsense is “absurd” (i.e. unthinkable) and facing it directly is impossible. Nonetheless, we shall not abdicate to

³⁸ See Ricoeur, *Time And Narrative*, Chapter 1, and above, p. XX.

³⁹ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, F. von Biederman, *Goethes Gespräche, Gesantausgabe*, ed. F. von Biedermann, Leipzig, 1909, 1, 434 ff., quoted in Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History*, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1949, p. 53.

depersonalization, renouncing any understanding of our connection to the past in order to accommodate social notions like tradition, culture, and 'theories' at the cost of losing our perspective as individual actors in the interplay of Legacy(es) and Inheritance(s). We must contemplate the unthinkable of the moment of passing, and embrace the awareness of the fact that it is our self-narration that makes tradition and culture graspable, and not vice versa.

And when you are gone there will be no memory
Of you and no regret. For you do not share
The Pierian roses, but unseen in the house of Hades
You will stray, breathed out, among the ghostly dead.

The Muses have filled my life
With delight.

And when I die I shall not be forgotten.
And I say to you someone will remember us
In time to come....

- Sappho, *Fragments, on the Muses*

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Paper presented at the conference 'Galileo, Science and the Arts', St. Michel College, University of Toronto, Canada.

2013

God and the gift, a mystical violence.

Paper presented at the Long Island Philosophical Society conference, New York City, NY.

2011

***Review of: Unità della ragione e modi dell'esperienza.
Herman Cohen e il Neokantismo. Atti del Convegno
internazionale di studi [Salerno 21-22-23 maggio 2007]***

Book Review, published online by the North American
Hermann Cohen Society. **2011**

***Review of: Ezio Gamba, La Legalità del Sentimento
Puro. L'Estetica di Hermann Cohen come modello di
una filosofia della cultura.***

Book Review, published online by the North American
Hermann Cohen Society.

2010

WORKSHOPS

"Teaching at Teaching Intensive Institutions"

2013

Bridgewater University and New England Cross-Sector Partnership

"Professional Development"

2013

Boston University, DRTS

"Late Modern Philosophy: The Unconscious"

2012

Boston University, Philosophy Department

RELATED EXPERIENCE

God Being Nothing – Book Project (due for Publication 2015)

Assistant Editor

2013-2014

North American Hermann Cohen Society

Website editor and acting Secretary

Jan – June

2012

After a couple of book reviews as contributor (see
publications), I was asked to re-organize the website
and oversee the publication of a volume.

Movieconnectionmagazine – mcmagazine.it

Writer, editorial collaboration

2008-2009